

A FORGOTTEN BORDERLAND: THE UPPER TIGRIS BETWEEN
SEPTIMIUS SEVERUS AND ANASTASIUS I

A Master's Thesis

by

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To my family

A FORGOTTEN BORDERLAND: THE UPPER TIGRIS BETWEEN
SEPTIMIUS SEVERUS AND ANASTASIUS I

The Graduate School of Economics and Social Sciences
of
İhsan Doğramacı Bilkent University

by

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Of
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ANKARA

January 2014

I certify that I have read this thesis and have found that it is fully adequate, in scope and in quality, as a thesis for the degree of Master of Arts in the Department of Archaeology.

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ABSTRACT

A FORGOTTEN BORDERLAND: THE UPPER TIGRIS BETWEEN SEPTIMIUS SEVERUS AND ANASTASIUS I

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The archaeology and history of the Roman centres in the southeastern Anatolia has been a subject that has been generally neglected by modern scholarship. In this thesis I hope to help fill this major gap in scholarship. In general, the thesis critically examines the known history and recent archaeological identity of the Upper Tigris Basin from the reign of the emperor Septimius Severus to that of Anastasius I. It is based on a detailed analysis of the primary and secondary sources for the historical geography of the region and the results of surveys and salvage excavations that have mostly been obtained in connection with the Ilisu dam project. As such, it sheds light on current thinking and the available evidence on how the Romans considered and viewed the Tigris as an eastern borderland and in this way achieves a better understanding of the character and the nature of Roman military and diplomatic strategy on the Upper Tigris and the concomitant border region.

Keywords: The southeastern Anatolia, the Upper Tigris Basin, Septimius Severus, Anastasius I, Ilisu dam project, borderland, the Tigris, Roman military and diplomatic strategy.

ÖZET

UNUTULMUŞ SINIR: SEPTİMİUS SEVERUS' TAN ANASTASIUS I DÖNEMİNE KADAR YUKARI DİCLE BÖLGESİ

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Güneydoğu Anadolu Bölgesi'nde yer alan Roma merkezlerinin arkeolojik ve tarihsel gelişimi genellikle çağdaş bilim dünyası tarafından göz ardı edilen bir konu olmuştur. Bu tezle bilim dünyasındaki bu temel boşluğu doldurmaya katkıda bulunacağımı umuyorum. Bu tez genel olarak, imparator Septimius Severus' tan Anastasius I dönemine kadarki süreçte Yukarı Dicle Havzası'nın bilinen tarihi geçmişini ve yakın dönemde kazandığı arkeolojik kimliğini incelemektedir. Bölgenin tarihsel coğrafyası için ana kaynakların ve ikincil yazınların detaylı analizlerine ve son dönemde çoğunlukla Ilısu baraj projesi kapsamında yürütülen yüzey araştırmaları ve kurtarma kazılarında elde edilen verilere dayanmaktadır. Böylece, Romalıların Dicle'yi bir doğu sınırı olarak nasıl değerlendirdiklerine dair düşünce yapısına ve yararlanılabilir bilimsel verilere ışık tutmakta ve bu yolla da Yukarı Dicle ve

beraberindeki sınır bölgesinde mevcut olan Roma askeri ve diplomatik stratejisinin karakter ve yapısını daha iyi anlamamızı sağlamaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Güneydoğu Anadolu Bölgesi, Yukarı Dicle Havzası, Septimius Severus, Anastasius I, Ilısu Baraj Projesi, sınır, Roma askeri ve diplomatik stratejisi.

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ABBREVIATIONS

Am. Marc.: Ammianus Marcellinus

BAR: British Archaeological Reports

BIAA: British Institute at Ankara

ca.: Circa

Cf.: Confer

Ed. / Eds.: Editor / Editors

e.g.: *Exempli gratia*

JRS: The Journal of Roman Studies

ND Or.: *Notitia Dignitatum Orientis*

Obv.: Obverse

Rev.: Reverse

Trans.: Translated

UTARP: Upper Tigris Archaeological Research Project

ZPE: Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

“ ὁ δὲ Σεουήρος ἀξίωμα τῇ Νισίβει δούς ἵππεϊ ταύτην ἐπέτρεψεν, ἔλεγέ τε μεγάλην τέ τινα χώραν προσκεκτήσθαι καὶ προβόλην αὐτὴν τῆς Συρίας πεποιῆσθαι.”

‘Severus bestowed some dignity upon Nisibis and entrusted the city to a Knight. He used to declare that he had added a vast territory to the empire and had made it a bulwark of Syria’.

Cassius Dio, History 60: 75 cf. Cary, E. 1989: 199

According to Cassius Dio, Septimius Severus established the provinces of Osrhoene and Mesopotamia to better protect the rich and important province of Syria. With the exception of Trajan’s brief occupation of the region, Rome’s reach had never before stretched so far to the east but over the subsequent centuries the struggle with Persia for hegemony in the region would only intensify. While the accounts of the ancient historians have been well parsed and thoroughly analysed, they have not yet been fully supplemented or corroborated by archaeological findings in the region. For a

variety of reasons this part of Rome's frontier has been the subject of too few researches, especially considering the outsized role that Persia played as Rome's longest lasting enemy. This thesis seeks to join the available archaeological realities to the detailed historical information, and to shed new light on this critical period in Rome's history.

1.1 Rome and Persia before Late Antiquity: An Overview

The ability of the Roman Empire to cope with changed circumstances on the borders was a consequence of a developed military strategy without any serious rivals in Classical Antiquity. In Late Antiquity, however, Rome faced an equal power to the east, Sasanians and while at the same time the barbarian tribes were causing difficulty to the north (Blockley, 1992: 165). For this reason, the creation of a properly fortified frontier in the east was essential for the Romans, which enabled them to confine conflicts between themselves and the Persians.

Comfort argues that "Before 363 on their eastern frontier the Romans never advanced to a line which permitted the easiest and most cost-effective defence of 'their' territory." (Figure 1) (Comfort, 2008a: 230). Actually, although the struggle between Rome and Persia lasted for centuries, the borders between the two sides barely changed. There is a general agreement that it was broadly drawn along the line of the Middle and Upper Euphrates before the early third century AD¹ (Butcher, 2003: 32). The fact is, it was already effectively established on this line in the Republican period, and became this way in 96 BC thanks to the treaty arranged between Rome and Parthia by Sulla², an

¹ All dates AD unless otherwise specified.

² For the treaty of 96 BC see Badian (1959) "Sulla's Cilician Command" *Athenaeum* 37: 279-303.

event which is accepted as a turning point in the history of Rome's relations with the Persians (Kallet-Marx, 1996: 335).

After Sulla's death there followed "An extraordinary Roman offensive on a variety of fronts in the East that lasted for a decade and a half and convincingly established Rome's military domination of the entire region." (Kallet-Marx, 1996: 341). After the reorganisation of the East by Pompey, Rome for the first time expanded its influence in the territory beyond the Euphrates if not specifically in the region between the Middle Euphrates and the Middle Tigris (Magie, 1966: 371-373). The Roman hegemony that was established over Armenia and Osroene at the end of the Third Mithridatic War, however, conflicted with earlier treaties with the Parthians in which Sulla (in 96 BC) as well as Lucullus (in 69 BC) and Pompey himself (in 66 BC) agreed upon the Euphrates being the border delimiting the interest of the two powers (Ziegler, 1964: 20-32; Whittaker, 1970: 159-191). In 53 BC, however, M. Licinius Crassus, governor of the province of Syria, crossed the Euphrates and invaded Mesopotamia, intent on conquest and plunder, but instead got an expensive military answer at Carrhae (Harran) (Butcher, 2003: 36). After the disastrous battle in which the Emperor himself and thousands of Roman legionaries lost their lives, Rome lost its dominant position over Armenia and Osroene (Wagner, 1983: 104).

After the battle of Carrhae, it took nearly a hundred years until the Kingdom of Osroene again became of serious interest to Rome (Ziegler, 1964: 45-51). In 20 BC Augustus and the Parthians entered into an agreement again making the Euphrates the formal frontier (Ziegler, 1964: 45-51). "The reign of Augustus was the last great age of the Roman conquests" and he was not willing to extend any further the frontiers of the

empire (Millar, 1993b: 104). Thereafter, this policy of accepting the Euphrates as the formal frontier between Rome and Parthia was adopted by his successors until Trajan's invasion of Armenia, Mesopotamia and down to the Persian Gulf in the war of 113-117 (Millar, 1993b: 104). Trajan's campaigns in Mesopotamia confirmed the status of Osroene as a client kingdom and also transferred the city of Nisibis from the control of Adiabene³ to Rome (Butcher, 2003: 45). Under his reign, thus, the empire reached its greatest extent and restored Roman hegemony over Armenia and Osroene (Southern, 2001: 14; Butcher, 2003: 45; Wagner, 1983: 104). However, direct Roman control over Osroene only lasted until 118 when Trajan's successor Hadrian abandoned this expansionist policy (Ross, 2001: 33) and withdrew from the conquered territory beyond the Euphrates and gave back to the Parthians all that Trajan had taken from them (Birley, 1999: 44).

A generation later, however, early in the reign of Marcus Aurelius and his co-Emperor Lucius Verus when the Parthians once again marched into Armenia and the Osroene, the Osroene dynasty showed a friendly disposition towards Rome (Wagner, 1983: 105). The resulting Parthian wars of Lucius Verus in 162-166 did little to change the established situation (Millar, 1993b: 104). "Obviously the successors of Trajan were not prepared to resume his policy of conquest but contended themselves with the protection of the frontier at the Euphrates" according to the strategic principles set in effect by of Pompey, Augustus, and Hadrian (Wagner, 1983: 105).

The Parthian Wars of Septimius Severus in 194-198 however saw a major change in Eastern Frontier policy, and resulted in the formation of a new province,

³ One of the Parthian client states occupied a district between the Upper Zab and the Lower Zab.

Mesopotamia, and the extension of Roman power to the Tigris (Millar, 1993b: 104; Butcher, 2003: 48). Under Severus the Euphrates was no longer the generally accepted frontier line lying between the two empires (Dillemann, 1962: 229). It was during Severus' first period of campaigning in the region, in 194-195, that the former kingdom of Osroene, which had previously been a buffer state between Rome and Persia, became a Roman province (Wagner, 1983: 107), while Upper Mesopotamia was formed into a Roman province later in 199⁴ (Figure 2). From this time, if not before, the area between the Middle Euphrates and the Middle Tigris most certainly came under direct Roman control. In particular, the establishment of the province of Mesopotamia on a permanent basis beyond the Euphrates offers a clear example of Roman military expansionism in the region, a situation which would only continue in the later imperial period (Kennedy, 1979: 255; Millar, 1993a: 125-126). As will be explained, various emperors, especially Diocletian, Constantius II, and Julian were greatly involved in the region, and had to deal with the much more aggressive Sasanian dynasty, which had replaced the Parthian dynasty with the accession of Ardashir to the throne in 224. As a matter of fact the last form of the frontier line in the region which was established in the treaty of 363 did not change significantly for many centuries, despite some losses on each other's territory by both sides (Figure 1) (Comfort, 2008a: 235) but under Anastasius I (491-518), this area became the flash-point for a major long-term struggle between Constantinople and Ctesiphon.

Rather surprisingly, despite its strategic significance in the relations between the Romans and the Persians throughout Late Antiquity, the area between the Middle

⁴ For what follows see Kennedy (1979: 255 and 1987: 57), Birley (1999: 132), and Butcher (2003: 48).

Euphrates and the Middle Tigris, roughly corresponding to the modern provinces of Şanlıurfa, Mardin, Western Diyarbakır, Western Şırnak, and Batman (Figure 3), is something of a forgotten borderland in the sense that it has rarely been the subject of serious academic enquiry. This thesis attempts to address that matter by reviewing the past work on the region and then, by using the results of more recent archaeological investigation, try to bring light to this forgotten part of the Roman Empire. Before going any further, however, it will be useful to sketch out the main details of earlier modern research into this topic.

1.2 The Present State of Research into the Region

According to Louis Dillemann, the first modern scholar who has examined this region in detail, one of the first and the best surveys of the region's geography is Lieut.-Colonel F.R. Maunsell's *Military Report on eastern Turkey in Asia*.⁵ It would seem that this contains a wealth of information about the social and physical geography of the area, and especially the third volume "The Tigris Valley: From the Persian Gulf towards Erzurum and Van" could have been very useful for locating and defining the existing Roman roads and forts. It was part of a series, but only one volume seems to have been preserved, which Louis Dillemann used in his own study, *Haute Mésopotamie Orientale et Pays Adjacents*, published in 1962. He describes the whole physical and human geography of Upper Mesopotamia in the relevant periods (Figure 4). He has many substantial discussions of ancient Roman routes and road networks.

⁵ Lieut.-Colonel F.R. Maunsell (1904) *Military Report on Eastern Turkey in Asia*. Today only Volume IV is available – "Middle Euphrates Valley: Country from the Gulf of Alexandretta towards Erzerum and Bitlis." compiled for the Intelligence Department, War office.

Apart from Maunsell and Dillemann, the surveys of the Tigris-Euphrates Archaeological Reconnaissance Project conducted by Guillermo Algaze and his colleagues between 1988 and 1990 in connection with the dam projects on the Euphrates and Tigris rivers are the most comprehensive researches in eastern Turkey recently (Figure 5). They have localized many prehistoric and protohistorical sites in the area including also a few that are Roman or Persian. They attribute the paucity of Roman sites in the area to the border dispute between Rome and Persia. But to say such a thing with any degree of certainty much more research needs to be done about the Roman or Sasanian structures and fortifications in the area.

In this respect, the long-term study of Tom Sinclair (1989), *Eastern Turkey: An Architectural and Archaeological Survey*, covers a broad area both in terms of geography and historical periods of the region and provides valuable knowledge of this rarely studied archaeological landscape. Direct personal knowledge obtained for the area has made possible for him to give the descriptions of many sites. He mainly concentrates on describing individual buildings. He establishes a basis of knowledge concerning the roads, bridges, fortifications and other structures in the region which may serve further research but mostly for the Mediaeval Period.

The last and perhaps the most comprehensive study on the subject matter examined in this thesis was the doctoral research undertaken by Anthony Martin Comfort in 2008. The published version of his thesis, 'Roads on the frontier between Rome and Persia', however, is basically concerned with the roads and communications in the three eastern provinces of the later Roman Empire; Euphratesia, Osroene and Mesopotamia from 363 to 602 (Figures 6-7). In his study, he examines the physical

evidence for the ancient bridges, cities and fortresses in the relevant regions, and pays particular attention to the roads. His study is a review of the remains of buildings of the period but he adds a new dimension to them by putting these roads in the context of the urban settlements. The field data he used is based on the results of his own fieldwork, conducted mainly around the upper reaches of the Tigris in conjunction with Google Earth satellite photographs around Zeugma on the Euphrates (Comfort, Reynal and Ergeç, 2000: 99-126; Comfort and Ergeç, 2001: 19-49), and he manages to place all roads and sites in a geographical context. His historical narrative is based on a study of the primary and secondary sources, but he does not include any summary of the political history of the region: rather he lays much more stress on the cultural affinities of the various centres. Even so, his work deserves admiration because there is no other synthesis covering the roads and fortresses in that large area.

These detailed surveys aside, the Eastern frontier provinces of the later Roman Empire have frequently been examined in broader detail by several modern scholars, most especially concerning where the exact line of Rome's most eastern frontier ran. For example, according to Ernst Honigmann⁶ the frontier between Rome and Persia between 363 and 603 was a line extending almost due north from Nisibis to the late Roman fortress of Cepha (Hasankeyf) and then following the Tigris west to a point opposite the junction with the Nymphius (Batman Su) (Figure 8) (Honigmann, 1935: 4-5). But according to Dillemann's observations, this cannot be right. Several monasteries east of this line were "beneficiaries of largesse" from late Roman emperors such as Mar

⁶ Ernest Honigmann (1935) *Die Ostgrenze des Byzantinischen Reiches von 363 bis 1071*. Bruxelles: Editions de l'Institut de Philologie et d'Histoire Orientales.

Gabriel, the best known today (Dillemann, 1962: 229). Its construction was completed in 512 under Anastasius, after the construction of Dara (Palmer, 1990: 118). It is also known that the fortress of Rhabdion (Hatem Tai Castle?) remained in Roman possession after 363 when Nisibis was surrendered to the Persians (Comfort, 2008a: 236) and it remained under Roman control until 604/605 (Palmer, 1990: 151). Thus, Honigmann's idea of the frontier seems unrealistic.⁷

As it is, because of the difficult security situation in this region, which also hampered the studies of both Sinclair and Comfort, it is doubtful that any further comprehensive field research on the nature of this part of the Eastern frontier will be possible in the Middle Euphrates-Middle Tigris area in the near future. On the other hand, detailed fieldwork of limited parts of the region has been made possible within the scope of the on-going dam projects and especially the Ilisu dam. In fact many excavations associated with dam construction have been conducted recently in the area, but very few of the sites which contain Roman traces have received the attention that they deserve, a major exception being Tilli (Çattepe). Even so, the results from these sites reveal what might exist at other places. What is really needed, however, is the detailed excavation of the Roman phases of known Roman sites such as Amida (Diyarbakır) and Cepha (Hasankeyf).

What this means is that the study of the Middle Euphrates-Middle Tigris region must necessarily be incomplete, as what first seemed a very promising subject turned out to lack much of the data that was required. To be positive, however, this study will provide not just a history of the later Roman Empire with its militaristic stance towards

⁷ For Dillemann's view of the frontier, see Figure 9.

its neighbours in the east for the period from Septimius Severus to Anastasius I, but will critically assess and review recent relevant archaeological discoveries within the region. My aim, in other words, is to set the development of eastern Roman policy in the Upper Tigris region within the context of both the available historical and archaeological data in an attempt to better understand late Roman military policy and diplomacy on the borders towards the Persians.

CHAPTER 2

THE GEOGRAPHY AND ENVIRONMENT OF THE MIDDLE TIGRIS BASIN AND TUR ABDIN REGION

To approach an understanding of how Rome perceived its Eastern frontier in the area between the Euphrates and Tigris we should first consider the region in general. In this chapter, therefore, I present an overview of the geographical characteristics of the Middle Euphrates and Mid Tigris area and briefly discuss the exact locations and the geopolitical positions of the cities in the region which feature in the border dispute between the Romans and the Persians.

2.1 The Upper Tigris Basin

Ancient Mesopotamia, surrounded by the Tigris and the Euphrates rivers and their tributaries, witnessed to the rise of many civilizations in history (Çevik, 2003: 105). Particularly the Tigris basin in the north and the northern section of the Mesopotamian plain in the south formed a very fertile region since very ancient times and encouraged the growth of population and trade (Sinclair, 1989: 161). In this respect, the Upper Tigris basin is one of the key locations for the interactions between Anatolia, Mesopotamia and Persia throughout history (Ferguson, 2005: 1).

The Tigris River itself originates from two sources in the Taurus Mountains and winds through deep canyons and narrow mountain gorges before flowing southwards past the city of Diyarbakır (Witchcraft, 1999: 10). When it reaches the outlying foothills of the Mardin-Midyat limestone massif to the south, it is deflected eastwards, and flows on the northern edge of this massif, before turning south to finally enter the plain and flow south-east into Iraq (Sözer, 1969: 112; Sinclair, 1989: 161).

The interior of the Upper Tigris basin is a mostly treeless and generally undulating region, and much of it now under heavy cultivation (Sinclair, 1989: 161; Çevik, 2007: 105). It includes the cities of Amida (Diyarbakır), Martyropolis (Silvan), Arzan and Cepha (Hasankeyf) which were crucial in the local history of Late Antiquity⁸ (Figure 10). This basin is delimited to the west by the extensive volcanic mass of Karaca Dağ, to the north and the east by the periphery of the southeastern Taurus range, and to the south by the Mardin-Midyat threshold (Çevik, 2007: 105). With these features, the region forms a geographical unit in itself (Sözer, 1969: 25-26).

2.2 The Tur Abdin

The Mardin-Midyat ridge, better known as the Tur Abdin, is an undulating limestone massif at a medium height stretching from the extensive volcanic mass of Karaca Dağ in the west to the valley divided by the Tigris River in the east (Çevik, 2007: 106). Most of this limestone massif consists of rocky hills intersected by small-scale valleys (Sinclair, 1989: 162). Since the Tur Abdin stands between the two natural

⁸ On the catalogue of sites from the Later Empire see Pollard (2000) *Soldiers, Cities and Civilians in Roman Syria*. Ann Arbor, MI: The University of Michigan Press.

corridors for trade and military invasion between the east and the west, it frequently witnessed the advance or retreat of one or other army in the struggle between Rome and Persia (Strabo 11.12.4 cf. Jones, 1924). It was sparsely populated, with two main centres at Marde⁹ (Mardin) and Midyat (Çevik, 2007a: 141-143). This made it attractive to early Christians who established churches and monasteries throughout this hilly country (Figure 11) (Sinclair, 1989: 162, 240). The first of these were founded in the late fourth century and most survived into the Early Islamic and Ottoman Periods (Sinclair, 1989: 162).

2.3 The Major Cities of the Region

Many of the cities of the region have been heavily occupied and reconstructed since the beginning of the Middle Ages and reached their present shape during a second wave of prosperity in the later Middle Ages (Sinclair, 1989: 161). The cities of Amida, Arzan and Martyropolis, which were strung out on the mediaeval trade route, and Cepha represent the major cities of the region in the relevant periods, while others like Nisibis (Nusaybin), later Dara and Mediaeval Dunaysir (Kızıltepe) represent the trading cities on the plain (Figure 10) (Sinclair, 1989: 161). Because control of the Upper Tigris basin was essential for the struggle between Rome and Persia, many fortified cities of the region¹⁰, most importantly Amida and Nisibis have a continuous and active role in the offensive and defensive policies of the Roman and Persian Empires in Late Antiquity (Isaac, 1990: 252).

⁹ Marde/Margdis/Mardoï? See Kroll, Roaf, Simpson, and Sinclair (2000: 89) “Map 89 C3” in R. J. A. Talbert, ed., *Barrington Atlas of the Greek and Roman World*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

¹⁰ On the late Roman fortress cities in the East see Chapter 3 in Pollard (2000: 85-110).

2.3.1 Amida (modern Diyarbakır)

The city of Diyarbakır stands on the west bank of the Tigris and north of the Tur Abdin (Millar, 1993a: 209). It lies on the primary east-west route that runs along the Tigris and at an intersection of the route coming from Malatya and Harput past Hazar Gölü in the Taurus Mountains (Sinclair, 1989: 164-165). The five and a half kilometer long city walls are heavily defended with large towers and present supposedly the longest mediaeval city-wall in existence (Figures 12-13) (Sinclair, 1989: 167).

The city was the most crucial military base in the region due to its strategic position (Honigmann, 1935: 2, 4) and therefore played a dominant role during the Later Roman and Byzantine Empires (Sinclair, 1989: 166; Pollard, 2000: 288). In the fourth century, the city was fortified by the emperor Constantius (Ammianus Marcellinus 18.9.1 cf. Pollard, 2000: 288), and became the leading city of the province of Mesopotamia (Çevik, 2007: 113). According to Ammianus, the purpose of the fortification was to provide the inhabitants and their countryside neighbours a secure place of refuge (Ammianus Marcellinus 18.9.1 cf. Millar, 1993a: 209). The city remained an important military centre until 363 when the Romans based legions at Amida and Cephais only (Sinclair, 1989: 370; Pollard, 2000: 288), and surrendered Nisibis to the Sasanians (Isaac, 1990: 252). After that time the population of the city was swollen by the immigrants from Nisibis and after the walls were completed it may have become the market centre for most of the west half of the Upper Tigris Basin (Sinclair, 1989: 371).

2.3.2 Maipa/Martyropolis/Ioustinianopolis (modern Silvan)

The city of Silvan, with part of its mediaeval walls still standing, lies along a route which descends from the Taurus Mountains and then continues south to cross the Tigris at Hasankeyf (Figures 14-15). Its early history is something of a mystery, but the Barrington Atlas identifies it with Maipa (Kroll, Roaf, Simpson, and Sinclair, 2000: 89 D2). Some scholars identify this place with the first century Armenian centre of Tigranocerta¹¹ (Holmes, 1917: 120-138). The fact is that the exact location of Tigranocerta is still problematic (Karg, 1998: 246). Sinclair notes some good clues to Tigranocerta's location that point to the Arzanene region (Sinclair, 1989: 361). For him, the possibility that Silvan is the site of Tigranocerta imposes some difficulties. For example, Tigranocerta is located on a river, and although there is a tributary of the river at some distance from Silvan to the South the present city is not on a river (Sinclair, 1989: 361-364).

After 363, when the Upper Tigris became the northern border separating the Roman Sophanene from the Sasanian Arzanene, Maipa was still the capital of the region (Figure 7) (Sinclair, 1989: 363). Around 410 it was re-founded as Martyropolis by the Syrian bishop Marutha (Nicholson, 1985: 668) and the region around it served as not merely a political borderland but as a border separating varied religious groups in the region (Karg, 1998: 246). From the late fourth to the late sixth century, Martyropolis was used as a base for concentrations of troops as was Dara (Procopius 3.2.11 cf. Dewing, 1940; Sinclair, 1989: 374). Because it was near the frontier and at a good

¹¹ The Armenian king Tigranes the Great founded the city of Tigranocerta and introduced the first city to the Tigris Basin somewhere between the Tur Abdin and the Taurus Mountains and it was to be his capital (Sinclair, 1989: 361).

distance from Amida (Procopius 3.2.4 cf. Dewing, 1940), it was converted into a major military establishment and used as a base for several expeditions into Arzanene late in the sixth century¹² (Sinclair, 1989: 374). At that time it was known as Ioustinianopolis, indicating a major rebuilding under the emperor Justinian (Syme and Birley, 1995: 56, 65).

2.3.3 Arzan/Erzen

What we learn from the literary sources is that Arzan was one of the centres in the Arzanene region (Çevik, 2008: 243). However, its exact location is not defined in either the Roman sources or those available for the Middle Ages, and it has not yet been located by modern scholarship (Çevik, 2008: 243). There is general agreement that the location was completely deserted by the later Middle Ages as otherwise it should be possible to identify its location from toponymic evidence (Sinclair, 1989: 164).

2.3.4 Cepha/Cephas (modern Hasankeyf)

Cepha is located on the bank of the Tigris just after it begins its bend to pass around the Tur Abdin (Sinclair, 1989: 162). The root of the modern name Hasankeyf refers to “Kipani” (rock) in Aramaic, a reference to the cliffs that dominate the location, and took the form of “Kefa” and “Kepha” in the Roman Period (Arık, 1999: 795). The place lies on the route from Amida to Cizre (Jazira) and thence Iraq (Sinclair, 1989: 231-232), thus as a place appropriate for passage across the Tigris it can be supposed that this location was settled from prehistoric times onwards (Arık, 1999: 795). It certainly

¹² See also Dillemann (1962: 116-121)

became one of the legionary bases on the north side of the Tur Abdin in Late Antiquity (Sinclair, 1989: 370; Comfort, 2008a: 63). A fortification¹³ was built here by Constantius II (324-361) and is probably where the later mediaeval town and castle stands, stretching back from the top of one of the cliffs cut by the Tigris to the valley (Figure 16) (Sinclair, 1989: 230; Miynat, 2008: 160). It is possible, however, that the legionary base occupied the flat area adjacent to the river crossing, a location now covered by the Lower Town of Hasankeyf (Arık, 1999: 795).

This place was one of the last surviving bases of the Roman superpower against Persia in Late Antiquity (Arık, 1999: 795; Comfort, 2008a: 42) and changed hands many times between the two empires (Miynat, 2008: 160). It was also a civilian city under the Late Roman Empire but reached its greatest prosperity under the Artukids in the late tenth and eleventh century as one of the magnificent centres of the region (Sinclair, 1989: 392-394). The major mediaeval monuments of Hasankeyf in the Castle area and in the Lower Town today represent a variety of the Early Islamic, Iranian-Seljuk and Roman-Byzantine cultural influences (Arık, 1999: 796; Comfort, 2008a: 63). The Castle area is now completely deserted, as is most of the Lower Town (Sinclair, 1989: 164) the part that will be inundated when the Ilisu Dam Project is completed.

2.4 Secondary Centres of the Region and the Trade Routes

Besides the four major cities above mentioned, several secondary centres of the Basin existed with an independent economic policies (Sinclair, 1989: 162).

¹³ It is questionable whether this fort was in what later became the upper town. See Honigmann (1935: 3) and Sinclair (1989: 370).

2.4.1 Eğil

One of the most substantial and important secondary centres was Eğil. The city was the capital of an Armenian Kingdom of Sophene and referred to as Carcathiocerta in the pre-Parthian period (Dillemann, 1962: 117; Sinclair, 1989: 162) and thus predated all of the nearby cities; the citadel of Eğil overlooked the western branch of the Tigris (Figures 17-18) (Dillemann, 1962: 121). It was evidently founded before Nisibis, and although placed on the route of the Persian royal road in the sixth century BC, it never became a real centre in the sense of trade or industry (Sinclair, 1989: 358).

2.4.2 Bezabde (modern Eski Hendek?)

The city of Bezabde was the capital of the district known as Zabdicene (Beth Zabday) (Sinclair, 1989: 365); records indicate uninterrupted settlement from the third century BC to the Classical Period (Lafli, 2012b: 16). But the exact location of Bezabde is still problematic.¹⁴ For example, while many scholars such as Dillemann and Hartmann, including also the travellers of the nineteenth century, located Bezabde usually in the centre of modern Cizre (Çevik, 2011: 1), for Sinclair the region Zabdicene appears to have been confined to the west bank of the Tigris River (Blockley, 1992: 22) and in the light of the literary sources the capital should have been the now deserted triangular site in the south-east of Cizre (Sinclair, 1989: 365). However, a more recent study by Çevik (2011), in the light of the studies of Lightfoot and Algaze (Lightfoot, 1983: 189-204; Algaze, 1989: 241-281), claims that the city which was one of the

¹⁴ The question of its archaeology will be archaeologically discussed in Chapter 4.

important Roman garrisons in the Upper Tigris Basin is not located in or near Cizre¹⁵, but rather should be sought 13 km north close to the village of Eski Hendek in the Idil region (Figure 19) (Pollard, 2000: 288, Çevik, 2011: 1).

It had been suggested that the city was a legionary base on the evidence of Ammianus, although this is not universally accepted (Isaac, 1990: 168). According to his accounts, Bezabde was a very strong fortified city with three legions¹⁶ situated on a fairly high hill and extending towards the bank of the Tigris (Ammianus Marcellinus 11.7 cf. Hamilton 2004: 193). It had the advantage of controlling both the approach to Nisibis and the way through the Tur Abdin (Figure 1) (Sinclair, 1989: 370). The city had come under the domination of Parthians in 129 BC and from 226 onward became a crucial point on one of the important routes between the Roman Empire and Mesopotamia (Laflı, 2012b: 17). Between the fourth and sixth centuries, the city of Bezabde and its vicinity played an active role in the border dispute between the Romans and Sasanians (Blockley, 1992: 22). In 363 it was captured by the Sasanians and between the fourth and sixth centuries they maintained control of the city and its vicinity (Isaac, 1990: 252; Laflı, 2012b: 17).

2.4.3 Nisibis (modern Nusaybin?)

Nisibis situated in Mardin province was one of the magnificent cities of the late Classical and the early Middle Ages (Figure 10) (Çevik, 2007: 141). Founded by Seleucus Nicator (312-281 BC), it was the first true city of the region in the pre-Parthian

¹⁵ See also Algaze G. et al., (2012: 42-45).

¹⁶ In the time of Constantine *II Parthica* was sent Bezabde and *II Armeniaca* and *II Flavia* came to help for the Persian war (Dando-Collins, 2010: 536). See also Ammianus Marcellinus (20.6.7 cf. Hamilton, 2004: 193).

period (Pollard, 2000: 286). Nisibis gained an important role because it provided the maintenance and expansion of the trade between Seleucia Pieria (Samandağ) and the Seleucid parts of Mesopotamia (Sinclair, 1989: 357-8). Nisibis retained its important trade position in the Late Roman period (Sinclair, 1989: 163). After Septimius Severus had organized the new province of Mesopotamia, he gave several cities including Nisibis colonial status (Jones, 1971: 220). Before that, it had probably been a Roman military outpost¹⁷ (Isaac, 1990: 399).

Nisibis was clearly the central place in the eastern part of the Mesopotamian shelf (Millar, 1993a: 482) and to hold such a place meant an advantage to dominate on the commercial exchanges between the two empires (Millar, 1993a: 179). Thus, it became a crucial location in the struggle between Rome and Persia from the third to the sixth century and before 363 had frequently changed hands (Oppenheimer, Isaac, and Lecker, 1983: 319-334; Çevik, 2007: 141). Until it was surrendered to the Sasanians after the campaign of Julian in 363, for over sixty years Nisibis was the primary commercial and military centre responsible for all the legions of Roman Mesopotamia (Sinclair, 1989: 163; Millar, 1993a: 179). After its capture by the Sasanians, the population of Nisibis had to abandon the city and migrate to Amida (Lee, 1993: 58). From that time on, Rome kept trying to regain Nisibis until 505 when Anastasius built a new fort at Dara as an alternative military base to replace Nisibis (Figure 20) (Honigmann, 1935: 101). Under the early Arab occupation Nisibis became for a time the administrative centre of the whole region (Sinclair, 1989: 163).

¹⁷ See Dura Europos (Salihiyeh) in Kennedy and Riley (1990: 113): Nisibis and Dura Europos have several characteristics in common as a Seleucid colony, planned city, and military base.

2.4.4 Dara

Dara, known as a Byzantine settlement, was located just above the meeting of the escarpment with the plain (Sinclair, 1989: 219, 374), 20 kilometers north-west of the Persian base at Nisibis; it was built in the years 505-507 by Anastasius I to provide a strong forward base for the Roman army in its struggle against Persia (Ensslin, 1927: 342-347; Honigmann, 1935: 101) after which it became the residence of the *Dux Mesopotamiae* (the commander of the Byzantine forces in Mesopotamia) (Figures 21-23) (Croke and Crow, 1983: 146; Sinclair, 1989: 374). Thereby, it retained a crucial importance during the struggle between Rome and Persia in the sixth century (Isaac, 1990: 264). Dara remained also an important city during the Arab occupation, and was occupied until at least the late twelfth century (Sinclair, 1989: 219).

2.5 The Ancient Territories between the Middle Euphrates and the Middle Tigris

The region between the Middle Euphrates and the Middle Tigris was historically divided into four regions which played a substantial role in the history of the struggle between Rome and Persia: Osrhoene, Upper Mesopotamia, Sophanene and Arzanene (Figure 24).

2.5.1 Osrhoene

The Hellenistic kingdom of Osrhoene, the region between the major source of the Khabur and the Euphrates (Segal, 1970: 164), became the province of Osrhoene following Septimius Severus' first campaign against Parthia in ca. 196 (Segal, 1970: 45),

confining the power of the ruling Abgars¹⁸ to the city of Edessa (Şanlıurfa) and its immediate environs (Segal, 1970: 164; Dodgeon and Lieu, 1991: 1). Although Osrhoene is *stricto sensu* outside the Tigris basin, it played a crucial role in the struggle between Rome and Persia before the third century, because of its strategically important position; therefore it stood in varying dependency of the powers of Armenia, Persia, and Rome (Wagner, 1983: 103). It remained as a Roman province until the invasion of the Arabs in the 7th century (Segal, 1970: 164; Sinclair, 1989: 143).

2.5.2 Upper Mesopotamia

Although Upper Mesopotamia was formed into the province of Mesopotamia by Trajan (Millar, 1993a: 99); it kept this status a very short time because Hadrian withdrew from the areas of Mesopotamia and across the Tigris, and gave back to the Parthians all that Trajan had taken from them (Bennett, 2001: 203; Comfort, 2008a: 230). A new province of Mesopotamia was established in broadly the same area but extending further east by Septimius Severus in late 199, and became a major military province with two legions that came under a *praefectus* of equestrian rank (Millar 1993a: 125). It was the most convenient region for access between Anatolia and Mesopotamia (Lee, 1993: 95). After the capture of Nisibis only the western part of Mesopotamia remained as a Roman province until the invasion of Arabs in the seventh century (Sinclair, 1989: 143; Segal, 1970: 164).

¹⁸ On the Abgar dynasty who ruled the Kingdom of Edessa and its vicinity see Segal (1970) *Edessa, the Blessed City*. London: Oxford University Press. Or Turkish trans. by A. Arslan (2002), İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları.

2.5.3 Sophanene and Arzanene

The northern boundary of the province of Mesopotamia faced a series of Armenian principalities, the so-called “Trans-Tigritane Provinces”¹⁹ (Comfort, 2008a: 273-274). Two of these, Sophanene and Arzanene were located in the area between the Tigris and the Taurus, where the cities of Amida and Maipa were located (Lee, 1993: 95). The Batman Su, one of the tributaries of the Tigris, divides this area north of the Tigris and Tur Abdin and south of the Taurus Mountains into the two territories of Sophanene and Arzanene (Redgate, 1998: 95); the first located to the west and opposite Diyarbakır and its vicinity, and Arzanene the area between Batman and Siirt (Figure 24) (Çevik, 2008: 243). Both principalities played an important role in the history of the border dispute between Rome and Persia and experienced regular interaction with both in the course of events²⁰ (Lee, 1993: 149). Although Sophanene is always attributed to the Roman hegemony, it is not completely clear that the Roman boundary was ever on the eastern edge of Arzanene because it was given up to the Persia after the border arrangements in 363 (Figure 1) (Sinclair, 1989: 366).

¹⁹ The Trans-Tigritane Provinces comprise seven southern regions running roughly between the Kara Su and the Great Zab: Ingilene, Sophanene, Arzanene, Corduene, Zabdicene, Moxoene and Rehimene. See Dillemann (1962, Fig. 28) and Redgate (1998, Map 5.2 Armenia).

²⁰ For details see Chapter 3.

CHAPTER 3

THE CREATION AND HISTORY OF THE MIDDLE TIGRIS FRONTIER

Severus claimed that he created a ‘bulwark of Syria’ through the establishment of the two Mesopotamian provinces, Osroene and Mesopotamia (Cassius Dio, 60: 75 cf. Butcher, 2003: 48). However, the Roman conquest of northern Mesopotamia resulted in several critical outcomes in the longer term (Isaac, 1990: 219). The devastating defeat of the Parthians ultimately triggered the rise of the Sasanian dynasty which was then able to take control of the Parthian Empire with its own expansionist policy (Kaçar, 2008: 7-8). This was in part due to the way that members of the Severan dynasty attempted to broaden Roman control over Mesopotamia (Watson, 1999: 6-7).

For example, Caracalla used a pretext to invade Parthia, and having defeated the Parthian army near Nisibis (Nusaybin), evidently planned to campaign further into Mesopotamia, plans that were cut short by his assassination in a palace coup half-way between Carrhae and Edessa (Brauer, 1995: 98). Macrinus, Caracalla’s praetorian prefect, was chosen to succeed him, but his new peace treaty with the Parthians was seen as a humiliating retreat for their army, and this, along with other factors, in the end resulted in an army rebellion that cost him his own life, and the acclamation of

Elagabalus, a grandson of Severus, as the new emperor (Butcher, 2003: 50). In the meantime the Parthian Kingdom gradually began to break apart in a series of rebellions that starting in the third century (Watson, 1999: 6), especially those in the southern part of Persia, allowed the rise of the Arsacid dynasty and a new power appeared on Parthian geography, the Sasanians (Frye, 1983: 117-18).

3.1 The Rise of the Sasanians and the Region during the First Half of the Third Century

The first Arsacid ruler, Ardashir I (224-241), regarded himself and his followers as the rightful inheritors of the Achaemenid Empire that had menaced the Greek world from the sixth to the fourth century BC (Yarshater, 1983: 116-117). Therefore, his objective and that of his successors, notably Shapur I (241-272), was always to acquire control of the whole of the Fertile Crescent together with Iran, the Levant, and Anatolia, and thus establish a new world-empire with themselves as the sole superpower (Butcher, 2003: 32-33). The Romans were aware of the fact that the Arsacid rulers might become a serious threat to their eastern territories, but the eventual arrival of the Sasanians brought a much more devastating army and military power than had previously erupted out of Persia (Watson, 1999: 7). Under Ardashir I and later his successor Shapur I, the Sasanians proved to be more aggressive and more adventurous than the Parthians (Southern, 2001: 233). Thus, the coming of the Sasanians changed the balance of power and opened a new chapter in the struggle for hegemony in the Near East (Redgate, 1998: 94). Moreover, for the first time in centuries Rome had to deal with an eastern foreign power that was determined to be its equal in military terms (Lee, 1993: 52).

Under these circumstances, the Sasanian Dynasty kept the Persian region more-or-less under its control throughout the next 400 years, from the first half of the third century towards the middle of the sixth century (Kaçar, 2008: 8). Thus, they now became a permanent threat for the Roman Empire in southern and southeastern Anatolia. Having radically changed the feudal character of the Parthian system of government, they established a more centralized kingdom in the East (Southern, 2001: 229-230; Kaçar, 2008: 9). Thus, they were able to use the resources of Mesopotamia and Iran better than the Parthians in their struggles with Rome (Isaac, 1990: 219).

By the time Severus Alexander took the imperial throne after the assassination of Elagabalus in 218 (Southern, 2001: 59), the Roman Empire had reached its greatest extent in the East (Butcher, 2003: 51). At that time, the Romans had reached as far as the Tigris and the middle reaches of the Euphrates and the army occupied almost all of upper Mesopotamia (Butcher, 2003: 51). According to the records of Dio and Herodian²¹, at the time the Sasanian ruler Ardashir, who desired to control the entire region over which their Achaemenian predecessors ruled, took the throne of Persia, he sent an ultimatum to Severus Alexander advising him to surrender Asia, the ancestral possession of the Persians (Rubin, 1975: 428-430). As part of the new expansionist policy of Ardashir, the Persians attacked the Mesopotamian city-state of Hatra in 218 and this inevitably brought conflict into the Roman frontier territory (Potter, 1990: 376; Southern, 2001: 61). In 230 Ardashir besieged Nisibis and entered Roman Mesopotamia (Butcher, 2003: 54). Despite Severus Alexander's attempt at negotiation, Ardashir refused it and continued his campaign on the Roman frontiers (Herodian 6, 4, 4-6 cf.

²¹ See Dio Cassius 80, 4, 1-2 and Herodian 6, 2, 1-2 cf. Dodgeon and Lieu, 1991: 16.

Dodgeon and Lieu, 1991: 19-20; Butcher, 2003: 54). Thus, in 231/232 Severus Alexander attacked the Sasanian West in three columns; one directed to Armenia, one sent to Media and one directed at the Sasanian centre, the last commanded by the emperor himself (Whittaker, 1970: 102-103; Millar, 1993a: 150). The Roman army was successful in Media but Severus Alexander was defeated on the Euphrates (Potter, 1990: 379; Southern, 2001: 278).

This campaign really ended as a draw, partly because at the end of the 232 Severus Alexander had to leave the East for the Rhine and Danube regions as Roman supremacy in the West was in danger because “the Germans” had crossed the Rhine and Danube rivers and even threatened Italy, and therefore Severus Alexander had to withdraw from the East in 232/233 (Herodian 6, 7, 1-6 cf. Dodgeon and Lieu, 1991: 29; Southern, 2001: 62).

In brief, the major series of struggles between Rome and the Sasanians started with the Sasanians’ declaration to end Roman control of Anatolia (Kaçar, 2008: 10). Between 237 and 240 Ardashir invaded Mesopotamia and captured the cities of Carrhae (Harran), Nisibis, and Hatra (al-Hadr in Iraq) (Millar, 1993a: 150). In particular, the capture of Hatra gave the Sasanians a strategically advantageous position over north Mesopotamia (Millar, 1993a: 149-150). The death of Ardashir in 240 was not enough to stop the Sasanian attacks because his successor Shapur I was to prove even more vigorous than him in the struggles with Rome (Kaçar, 2008: 10).

3.2. The Second Half of the Third Century

Gordian III tried to counter the attacks which had been conducted by Ardashir I, and launched an expedition against Persia in 243 against his son Shapur (Yarshater, 1983: 125). He was initially very successful and even regained Carrhae and Nisibis, and then moved towards Asorestan (the province of Assyria-Babylonia under the Sasanian Empire, 226-640) (Butcher, 2003: 54, 381). In 244, however, Shapur gained a decisive victory over the Romans and the emperor died on the battle field (Macdermot, 1954: 80). Soon after his successor Philip the Arab was forced to arrange a peace treaty with Shapur that was extremely generous for the Sasanians (Macdermot, 1954: 80). As a result of this Rome not only experienced a financial loss but also lost its influence over Armenia (Baynes, 1910: 626). Shapur's triumph over the Romans continued with the conquests of Antiochia (Antakya) and the other Syrian cities (Millar, 1993a: 160). Furthermore, in 260, Shapur defeated the Roman army once more under the command of Valerian, somewhere near Edessa, capturing the emperor along with some of his major commanders²² (Butcher, 2003: 58). The capture of Valerian was an unprecedented event and the severest humiliation for Rome (Kaçar, 2008: 11). For the peoples of Persia, Shapur's triumph over these three emperors meant an end of the centuries of Persian humiliation at the hands of the Romans (Macdermot, 1954: 80).

During the mid- and later third century, in addition to the Sasanians, the Roman Empire faced a number of unprecedented challenges along the Rhine and Danube, as well as frequently being split by civil wars, and the formation of the Gallic Empire, and

²² Shapur's triumph over the three emperors; Gordian III, Philip the Arab and Valerian, is shown on a trilingual inscription in the Ka'ba-ye Zardosht at Naqsh-e Rostam in Iran. For more detail see Daryaee (2009: 6-8); and Macdermot (1954: 77-80).

the actions taken by provincial rulers or Roman governors in the East have to be seen in that context (Blockley, 1992: 172). Before Aurelian, the Palmyrenes had proven to be loyal upholders of Roman interests in the region (Long, 1996: 61-62). Palmyra's location between Rome and Persia meant that in peaceful times it prospered as a centre for trade (Long, 1996: 61-62). During the second century, the Romans stationed a garrison at Palmyra, although it remained a free city at the direction of Hadrian (Richmond, 1963: 54). By the third century, however, Palmyra had become more closely allied with Rome, and their ruler Odaenathus was considered a member of the Roman senate and was possibly the governor of Roman Syria (Richmond, 1963: 52; Butcher, 2003: 58).

In 260, following the capture of Valerian, Odaenathus aggressively defended the Roman prerogative in the east, dispatching the usurper Quietus at Emesa and leading successful campaigns in Persian territory (Long, 1996: 62). As a result of his success, Odaenathus was given unprecedented titles by the emperor Gallienus (Long, 1996: 63). But after his death his widow Zenobia and her son Vaballathus established their own eastern empire on par with the Gallic Empire in the West (Millar, 1993a: 172-73; Butcher, 2003: 58-59). While Odaenathus had impressive success against the Persians and quite likely preserved Rome's eastern frontier, Aurelian did not consider Zenobia or her and Odaenathus' son to be his equal (Butcher, 2003: 59). Naturally, once Aurelian had restored the threatening situation in Europe, the emperor sought to reassert undeniable Roman dominance in the Eastern provinces and defeated Zenobia and her son and destroyed Palmyra (Butcher, 2003: 60; Potter, 2004: 270-72). That said, at a later date Diocletian recognized the importance of the location and established a

legionary garrison there, but while the city enjoyed a modest revival in prosperity, it would never regain such a prominent position again (Richmond, 1963: 48, 54; Butcher, 2003: 61).

After the death of the Sasanian King Shapur in 272, a period of civil strife followed in the Persian Empire giving the Romans an opportunity to strengthen their eastern strategy (Frye, 1983: 127-28). Carus decided to take advantage of this turbulence in Persia and launched an expedition against the Sasanians, and achieved some initial successes before his death in 283 (Mitchell, 2007: 45; Cameron, 1993: 31). These were the first fully successful military actions of the Roman Empire against the Sasanian threat from the east (Butcher, 2003: 61; Eadie, 1996a: 73). However, after the death of Carus during his campaign, his successor Numerian could not maintain Rome's position over the Sasanian regime. Numerian decided to withdraw from the region, and according to Malalas, this allowed the Sasanians to lay siege to Carrhae (Malalas, 12, pp. 303, 5-305, 2 cf. Dodgeon and Lieu, 1991: 118). In 284, while on his return to the West, where his older brother Carinus was in power at Rome, he was taken ill and died somewhere to the east of Nicomedia.

After Numerian's death the Roman army elected Diocletian as its new leader (Eadie, 1996a: 73; Corcoran, 1996: 5). The following year he arrived into the Balkans and campaigned against Numerian's brother Carinus, ruler in the west (Corcoran, 1996: 5). During the battle Carinus was assassinated, and Diocletian became the sole Emperor (Southern, 2001: 133). Within a matter of months, Diocletian appointed Maximian to rule the west, first as *Caesar* and then in 286 as *Augustus* (Corcoran, 1996: 5), the new emperor realised that the greatest threat came from the east and so he should remain in

that area. Diocletian also realised the empire was too large and faced too many threats for two co-emperors to deal with. Thus, in 293, the first tetrarchy was formed when two *Caesares* were appointed²³, Galerius who served in the East under Diocletian and Constantius who served in Gaul under Maximian (Millar, 1993a: 177).

About 288, Diocletian placed Tiridates, an Arsacid prince, on the throne of Armenia and Vahram II (276-293), the Sasanian ruler, by his inaction acquiesced to Diocletian's action (Yarshater, 1983: 128). Sasanian control in that time had probably become weakened over some sections of Armenia (Redgate, 1998: 113). It was weakened further because civil strife followed in the Persian Empire after the death of Vahram II in 293 and his son Vahram III ruled the Sasanian Empire for a very brief period in 293 until his uncle Narseh (293-303) replaced him and consolidated his position on the throne (Yarshater, 1983: 128). Narseh was determined to regain the territory that Rome had taken immediately after the death of Shapur I and during the reign of Vahram II and attacked Armenia and Mesopotamia (Kaçar, 2008: 12; Yarshater, 1983: 130). He deposed Tiridates in 296 and defeated a Roman army under Galerius in 297 and thus the Sasanians once more became the superior power in Mesopotamia and Armenia (Barnes, 1982: 55). Even so, this victory did not last long as in the following year Galerius entered Armenia with his rebuilt army and defeated the Sasanians at Satala near modern Erzincan and captured both Narseh's treasury and his family (Blockley, 1992: 5).

²³ The tetrarchy comprises of two *Augusti* and two *Caesar*, only functioned from 293 to 306. It ceased entirely once all the rulers held the full rank of *Augustus* by 310. See Corcoran (1996: 5-9). For more detailed account of the whole period of 284-324, see Barnes (1982) *The New Empire of Diocletian and Constantine*, Harvard University Press.

In 298, Diocletian joined Galerius in Nisibis and they decided to respond to the Persian peace overtures, which Galerius had earlier rejected (Blockley, 1992: 5). Although, Rome had lost many eastern regions in the third century, the emperors Diocletian and Galerius, with this treaty, brought this series of territorial losses to an end and even regained some (Butcher, 2003: 61). Under the terms of this treaty, the Romans regained control of Amida, Nisibis, Singara and Bezabde (Kaçar, 2008: 13) and gained indirect rule over Mesopotamia and Armenia, without military occupation (Millar, 1993a: 178). In this way they not only increased the Roman presence in the region but also obtained additional land beyond the Tigris River (Yarshater, 1983: 130). Both sides agreed that five districts – Intelene, Sophene, Arzanene, Carduene and Zabdicene – lying largely on the far bank of the Tigris, were to be held by the Romans and that the Tigris River was to be a borderland between the two empires (Figure 25) (Winter, 1989: 555; Blockley, 1992: 5-6). Furthermore, Nisibis was to be the sole trading post between the two powers and the Armenian satrapies were left independent but were considered Roman dependencies (Blockley, 1992: 6). For the Romans, this treaty was both a diplomatic triumph and a rectification of the humiliations they had endured since the capture of Valerian (Kaçar, 2008: 13).

Diocletian intended the treaty to ensure a lasting peace with the Sasanians (Eadie, 1996a: 79). He was clearly aware that Rome's power was not infinite, and so he created a new frontier system in the region (Millar, 1993a: 180). Rather than base his soldiers in their former camps, he built new forts along the roads themselves (Eadie, 1996a: 76). He started a recovery program including the construction of new forts from

Diyarbakır down the Upper Tigris²⁴ (Millar, 1993a: 180). He made the provincial administration more efficient and he tried to bring the ruinous inflation of the third century under control (Butcher, 2003: 61). In this general context of reform, the construction of roads can be seen as one more attempt to re-establish peace and normalcy in the Roman Empire rather than a new strategy to deal with the possibility of invading Sasanian territory or to provide advanced warnings of a Persian invasion²⁵ (Eadie, 1996a: 76).

For the Persians, the treaty resolved nothing and for Nerseh himself, approving this treaty was nothing more than a humiliation which threatened his western territories and diminished his prestige in the eyes of the Persian nobility (Blockley, 1992: 7). For this reason, when it was due for renewal Nerseh and even his successor Hormizd refused to renew it without, or so it seems, any major Roman objection (Barnes 1982: 62, 76; Blockley 1992: 7).

In conclusion, during the third century, Rome's eastern regions suffered greatly from Sasanian attacks, during which control of Nisibis, the key fortress on the Roman side of the Upper Mesopotamian Plain, and the adjacent region was lost (Bowman, 2008: 88). After the chaos of the third century, however, the Roman Empire took a defensive stand against Persia which was effective but extremely costly to maintain (Blockley, 1992: 165). It continued to suffer from the pressure both from the Barbarians

²⁴ There is almost no evidence of an immediate policy of fortification in Mesopotamia and Osroene; that seemingly comes only later during the reign of Constantius II. As for Diocletian, solid archaeological evidence only exists for his fortifications to the south in Syria, the so-called *Strata Diocletiana* (Figure 26). See van Berchem (1952) and Butcher (2003).

²⁵ According to the historical accounts of Ammianus Marcellinus (who served as a soldier on the eastern frontier in the 350s and 360s), Diocletian's work of fortification was part of a wider policy in order to prevent the Persians from overrunning Mesopotamia. See Dodgeon and Lieu (1991: 121-133) and Matthews (2007: 549-564).

in the north and west and from the Persians in the east. However, the period beginning with the treaty of 299 saw the creation of a fortified borderland which satisfied both the Persians and the Romans (Winter, 1989: 560). The creation of this frontier by the emperor Diocletian enabled the Romans to confine conflicts between themselves and the Persians to one region (Blockley, 1992: 165). The Persians had to wait until 363 before they were able to challenge the settlement of 299 and return the border region to a configuration that was acceptable to them.

3.3 The Fourth Century

The fourth century represented the triumph of Roman sovereignty in the region (Isaac, 1990: 229). However, in the conduct of foreign relations between Rome and Persia the potential use of military power, offensive or defensive, became of greater importance (Blockley, 1992: 167). The diplomacy between the two sides developed a number of ways to resolve the possibility of conflict.²⁶ However, the clash of differences between the two dominant rulers of the time, Constantine and Shapur II, made warfare between the two sides inevitable.

Constantine was proclaimed *Augustus* by the Roman army in Britain after the death of his father Constantius in 306, and succeeded to his father's territories (Corcoran, 1996: 6). By 312, he controlled all of the Western Empire and by 313 posed a real threat to Licinius who ruled the East (Butcher, 2003: 62). In 324 Constantine defeated Licinius and thus became the sole ruler a unified Roman empire (Millar, 1993a: 207). His arrival in the east as sole emperor firmly established Christianity as the

²⁶ See Lee (1993) *Information and Frontiers: Roman Foreign Relations in Late Antiquity*. Cambridge University Press, 49-66.

leading religion of the Roman Empire. “The association of Christianity with Roman alliance, which soon became an assumption of Roman foreign policy, was seen by the Persian government as a threat to its position both within and outside Persia.”²⁷ (Blockley, 1992: 10-11).

The inevitability of yet another war between the Roman Empire and Persia became clear when in 334, Shapur II, the new Sasanian ruler, refused to renew the treaty of 299 (Southern, 2001: 245). He then sent an envoy to Constantine and claimed that the borders between the two sides had to be reorganized (Barnes, 1981: 259; Klein, 1977: 195). Constantine’s refusal to discuss any new treaty increased the tension in the eastern border of the empire. After the death of Constantine in 337, Shapur took advantage of the quarrel over the succession to invade Mesopotamia and attack Nisibis. Nisibis always became the first target for the Persians because it was situated in a strategic position between both empires as headquarters of Roman Mesopotamia (Sinclair, 1999: 370). In 344, Shapur captured Nisibis and Upper Mesopotamia again and also invaded Armenia and deposed the Armenian king (Redgate, 1998: 133). The new emperor of the East, Constantius II was, however, quick to respond to Shapur’s actions. Constantius appointed his nephew Hannibalianus as the new king of Armenia (Frye, 1983: 137). Hannibalianus expelled the Sasanians from the territory and once more Armenia came under the Roman control (Kaçar, 2008: 13).

²⁷ The issue of religious change in the Roman Empire as it relates to this region is beyond the scope of this thesis. Nevertheless, the religious differences between the two empires would come to play an increasing role in their ongoing conflict. Incidentally, northern Mesopotamia has some of the oldest continuously Christian communities in the world, a circumstance that can be directly traced to this period of Roman-Sasanian relations.

In the year 346 Shapur attacked Nisibis again but he failed to capture the place (Blockley, 1992: 15). In 348 a battle was also fought near Singara but once more the Persians gained nothing (Blockley, 1989: 475-477). In fact, the truth behind the failure of the Persian attacks in this period was the administrative re-organization and fort construction that had taken place in Mesopotamia and Osroene since the time of Diocletian (Kaçar, 2008: 16).

During the 350s, the emperor Constantius adopted a defensive as opposed to an offensive policy against the Persians. He continued constructing and strengthening fortresses in the region, including Amida, Telli, and Cephra, in order to ensure the permanence of the eastern frontier and minimize the chances of attack (Figure 10) (Butcher, 2003: 62; Lightfoot, 1986: 509, 521). Thus, he maintained Roman domination over Mesopotamia by holding on to these fortified places, without large scale battles, and by consolidating the loyalty of Armenia²⁸ (Hunt, 2008: 12-13). In fact, “the objective of Constantius’ foreign policy was to maintain the territorial integrity of the Roman Empire, which meant in the East the maintenance of the settlement of 299.” (Blockley, 1992: 23).

In 359-360, however, Shapur returned to Mesopotamia again and captured the key Roman fortresses there including Amida²⁹ and Bezabde (Butcher, 2003: 63). In particular, the destruction of Amida by Shapur showed Constantius the need to amass a larger military force for a counter-offensive (Hunt, 2008: 40). However, Constantius had little time with which to defend his eastern frontier because in 361 he faced a rebellion against him in the west by his cousin Julian who had been proclaimed *Augustus* in Paris

²⁸ For details of Constantius’ defensive strategy, see Warmington (1977: 509-20).

²⁹ On the siege of Amida, see Ammianus Marcellinus, 18 and 19 cf. Hamilton, 2004: 158-175.

(*Lutetia Parisorum*) (Butcher, 2003: 63). It happened that Constantius died on the way to challenge Julian, and so Julian smoothly became the sole emperor of the Roman world.

After securing his position, Julian arrived in Antioch in 362 to resume Constantius' war on the Sasanians (Butcher, 2003: 63). His Persian campaign was intended to restore Roman sovereignty in the eastern territory (Potter, 2004: 517). Although, in 363, Julian defeated the Sasanian army near Ctesiphon (the ancient Parthian capital), he failed at taking the city itself (Butcher, 2003: 63). His ambition for a glorious war against the Persians eventually led him to failure (Hunt, 2008: 74). In another confrontation with the Sasanians in the same year he was fatally wounded and Jovian, the commander of the imperial guard, was chosen as his successor by the army (Baydur, 1999: 110-111).

Jovian entered into a quick agreement with the Sasanians which was negotiated under pressure and according to which he had to cede the strategic Mesopotamian fortress cities of Nisibis and Singara (Ammianus Marcellinus 25.7.8 cf. Hamilton, 2004: 304). Ammianus Marcellinus vividly describes the unwilling residents of Nisibis being forced from their city (Ammianus Marcellinus 25.9.1-7 cf. Hamilton, 2004: 307-309). After the cession of Nisibis to the Persians in 363, the northern boundary of the province of Mesopotamia was divided into a series of Armenian principalities, so-called "Trans-Tigritane Provinces" (Figure 25) (Comfort, 2008a: 273-274). According to the new agreement of 363, the Persians acquired three of the five Trans-Tigritane regions (except Ingilene and Sophene) together with fifteen fortresses including Tilli (Lightfoot, 1986: 521; Redgate, 1998: 134-135). Thus, the eastern part of the province of Mesopotamia as

established by Galerius and Diocletian was lost (Southern, 2001: 279) and on the south of the Tigris River only one major fortress Rhabdion (east of Nisibis) remained in Roman hands³⁰ (Figures 27-28). Especially with the Sasanian acquisition of Nisibis the balance of power in Mesopotamia shifted northwards and the new provincial capital thus became Amida (Comfort, 2008a: 272). The boundary between the two powers which was established in 363 endured until towards the end of the fifth century (Southern, 2001: 279).

After the death of Jovian in 364, during the march from the East to Constantinople, Valentinian who was a senior army officer from Pannonia became the new emperor (Blockley, 1992: 30). As soon as he took office, he appointed his brother Valens as a co-Augustus to serve in the East (Butcher, 2003: 64). The Sasanians, meanwhile, began consolidating the new frontier, their real intention was to conquer the whole of Armenia and gain direct rule of that kingdom (Butcher, 2003: 64). Shapur reminded Valens of the agreement made with Jovian that Rome had no influence over Armenia, however, Valens had no intention of observing the terms of Jovian's treaty (Curran, 2008: 92). But, before he could act according to his own wishes he was distracted both by the rebellion of Procopius in 365-366 and by the invasion of Thrace by the Goths in 367-369 (Butcher, 2003: 64; Heather, 1994: 12-18). But then in 370 because of Shapur's activities in Armenia, Valens campaigned there in order to take revenge upon those who had supported the Persians and to defeat the Persian offensive (Redgate, 1998: 135).

³⁰ There are different interpretations in Honigsmann (1935), Palmer (1990), and Sinclair (1989).

During the years from 370 to 375 the principal relations between Rome and Persia were maintained diplomatically (Blockley, 1987: 226). When the emperor Valens died with almost his entire army at the Battle of Adrianople in 379, opening the Eastern Empire to attack from the North by the Goths, Theodosius was appointed to rule the East by the new western emperors Gratian and Valentinian (Butcher, 2003: 66). In the same year Shapur III came to the Persian throne and instead of taking advantage of the major defeat at Adrianople he agreed that the Armenian Kingdom would be partitioned between the two rival powers (Butcher, 2003: 66). After the assassination of Valentinian in 383, Theodosius became the sole ruler of the Roman Empire and he appointed his two sons Arcadius in 383 and Honorius in 393 as co-emperors (Butcher, 2003: 66). In 387 a western usurper Magnus Maximus, who was responsible for Gratian's death, invaded Italy and Theodosius had to withdraw his troops from the East to deal with him (Isaac, 1990: 230). But again the Persians made no serious effort at taking more of the Eastern territories under their direct control.

After the death of Theodosius in 395 the empire was divided again into two parts between his sons Honorius in the East and Arcadius in the West. Between 421-422, during the reigns of Arcadius and then his son Theodosius II, no major confrontation occurred between Rome and Persia because the frontiers of both empires were under intense pressure from external attack (Butcher, 2003: 67, 69). In the Sasanian Empire the Darial pass was in danger of being opened, allowing the penetration of the Huns into Persia, and the Persians had to demand Roman support in guarding it (Isaac, 1990: 230). At the same time the western empire was experiencing serious decline (Butcher, 2003: 68). However although relations between Rome and Persia continued into the reign of

Zeno, on the surface cooperative, serious tensions between both empires were building in a number of areas (Blockley, 1992: 83). This largely happened because of the spread of Arab control. At the beginning of Zeno's reign Arab raids into Mesopotamia began to happen on a frequent basis (Trimingham, 1979: 114), and had the side-effect of bringing the Romans and the Persians to the brink of war.

3.4 Anastasius: a Measured Approach to the Frontier Policy³¹

The tension between both sides continued to increase during the early years of the reign of Anastasius I and was to lead to a major change in the relations between the two powers (Blockley, 1992: 87), with ultimately unfortunate consequences for both sides. At the start of the reign of Anastasius I war-hungry generals in Constantinople had become influential enough to threaten the long peace that had existed between the two major powers in this Eastern border region. It was claimed by Constantinople that the treaty of 363, surrendering Nisibis to Persia, stipulated that Nisibis was to remain in Persian hands for 120 years only, and that it should have been returned to Roman control in 483 (Butcher, 2003: 69). Although there is no firm evidence that this really was the case, it became the pretext for Anastasius' generals to argue that the defences of the Tur Abdin region and Upper Mesopotamia needed to be improved. Anastasius may well have intended to maintain peace between the two powers, but his generals convinced him of the need for considerable resources to strengthen the eastern frontier of the empire against the possibility of future Persian aggression (Blockley, 1992: 91). However, it was difficult to operate such a defensive system for the Mesopotamian

³¹ Quoted from Blockley (1992: 86).

frontier without the existence of a 'large and well-stocked' base close to the border, to serve the generals and their armies just as Nisibis had done in earlier times (Croke and Crow, 1983: 143-159).

Thus in about 505-507 work began on the construction of the fortress of Dara (Nicholson, 1985: 663), the location being specifically chosen for its closeness to Nisibis and its setting just within the accepted border between the two powers (Figure 29) (Redgate, 1998: 154). Its immigrant population was a complex mix of peoples who were often influenced by the Persians as much as by the Romans (Cameron, 1996: 155). In addition, Anastasius built a series of other fortresses along the Euphrates as a part of a general programme aimed at improving the defensive but also potentially offensive infrastructure in the eastern provinces (Whitby, 1986b: 717-735). Thus, at his death in 518, it may be thought that he left the eastern borders of the Roman Empire in a better condition militarily and economically than it had been since the reign of Theodosius II (Blockley, 1992: 95). But as events were to show, once work began on the building of the fortress at Dara, and those other fortified cities along the Euphrates, then in was only a matter of time before active hostilities began between the two powers, ending a more-or-less continuous peace that had been established in 363 after many years of conflict.

CHAPTER 4

THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVIDENCE

Although many of the modern day large and small cities of the Upper Tigris Basin were founded long before the Roman period, their visible urban structure presents a picture which was almost completely formed in the Middle Ages (Sinclair, 1987: 160). Therefore, with the significant exception of Diyarbakir, there is nothing to be seen in them of pre-mediaeval date. Outside of these urbanised centres, until the late 1980s, this region was completely forgotten by archaeologists, with the exception of the Tur Abdin monasteries, studied by Gertrude Bell in 1909, and nothing was known about its archaeological remains (Steadman and McMahon, 2011: 847). Since then, many investigations have been undertaken in the area but they are not enough to fill in the many gaps in the Roman historical record. Although the written sources indicate a great density of Roman and Late Antique period fortifications and walled cities in the region, almost none of these have been archaeologically identified and only a very few of these have been the subject of archaeological exploration. In archaeological terms, while there are some syntheses available regarding the history and archaeology of the region at this time our understanding of the Roman period in the region is still greatly incomplete.

This is still true even despite the work on many dam projects in the general area. Until recently what study there has been in the field of archaeology within the scope of the dam projects on the Euphrates and Tigris Rivers has concentrated on the better-known and already identified centres, most of them prehistoric in date. In this context, especially on the Upper Tigris basin even though a large number of extensive excavations have been conducted on these sites, the known Roman period settlements have generally been ignored. More to the point, although some locations like Amida and Nisibis are known to have had crucial importance for the frontier struggle between Rome and Persia, as well as in prehistoric and mediaeval times still little excavation has yet been attempted at them. Even so, data for the Roman and Late Antique period are available and in this chapter I will discuss the very limited results of the surveys and excavations almost all done in connection with the construction of the Ilisu dam in the area.

4.1 The Archaeological Surveys and Excavations in the Area

4.1.1 The Tigris-Euphrates Archaeological Reconnaissance Project (1988-1989)

The Tigris-Euphrates Archaeological Reconnaissance Survey Project was formed by Guillermo Algaze and his colleagues in 1988, in order to conduct extensive surveys in the areas of southeastern Anatolia which are archaeologically unknown and which will be soon affected by the construction of dams on the Euphrates and the Tigris (Figure 5) (Algaze, 1989: 242). For Algaze, the Tigris Basin had the least known archaeological background, for this reason he and his team mostly focused their research

on this region and extended it to an area including the two important tributaries of the Tigris – Batman Su and Bohtan Su – and portions of the Tigris to the north and southeast of Cizre (Figure 30) (Algaze, 1989: 242).

They first began to document the range of archaeological sites and to collect pottery on the larger mounds (Algaze, 1989: 242; Steadman and McMahon, 2011: 847). During these researches, however, only a very limited number of sites with indications of Roman or Late Antique occupation were identified through the collected ceramics, principally the red/brown washed wares which were typical for the Classical Period but almost always in limited numbers (Algaze, 1989: 245). For example, the Cizre-Silopi plain survey in 1989 identified only two out of seventy-five archaeological sites as being late roman (Tilli and Bezabde), with four additional sites yielding Roman Sasanian pottery (Basorin Höyük, and near Girik Bedro, Fenik, and Kazrik Boğazı) (Algaze, Hammer and Parker, 2012: 8-11 and 40-45). However, we need to bear in mind that Algaze's survey was not fully comprehensive as some places including the Upper Town at Hasankeyf (Cepha/Cephas), one of the key Roman fortresses, were not included in his survey project either because they were inaccessible at that time or because they were located above the level that was directly affected by the Ilısu dam works and its eventual flood level (Comfort, 2008a: 27).

Algaze explains this paucity of Roman sites in the region with the fact that the region was a “contested border” between the Rome and Persia (Algaze, Hammer and Parker, 2012: 40). Whatever the reason, he located only two principal sites that can be securely associated with the Roman and Late Antique periods, Çattepe (Tilli) and Eski

Hendek (Bezabde?). However, we should add here one other site in the same general region as Algaze's survey that has also produced Roman material, Üçtepe (Charcha).

4.1.1.1 Çattepe (Tilli/Tell Fafan)

Tilli, modern Çattepe village, is strategically located on the western bank of the river at the confluence of the Tigris and Bohtan rivers³² (Figure 31). Lehmann-Haupt had identified the site as an ancient fortress in 1899 (Lehmann-Haupt, 1910). However, Lightfoot was the first one who examined the site in larger detail (Lightfoot, 1986: 509-529 and 1991: 1-9). In 1985 he and his colleagues visited the area and recorded the visible remains and located the northwest tower of the fort and an altar (Lightfoot, 1986: 514 and 1991: 1). The site is probably the most important Roman site located by Algaze (Velibeyoğlu et al., 2002: 783-857). Lightfoot identified the site as the original base of a unit named in the Late Roman *Notitia Dignitatum* as the *Equites Pafenses*³³ (Lightfoot, 1986: 518). For Algaze, the fort was a part of the Tigris *limes* and was built directly over an older settlement mound (Algaze, 1989: 254). The earliest remains of the site from the Late Chalcolithic period have been exposed and partly destroyed by the river erosion on the southwest of the mound (Algaze, 1989: 254).

The site without a doubt has played a significant role in the struggle between Rome and Persia on the Upper Tigris in the fourth century (Comfort, 2008a: 327). The western walls of the Roman settlement facing the Tigris are well preserved and still visible with a number of solid towers, either rectangular or semi-circular in shape

³² For the geographical definition of the site, see Chapter 2.

³³ Pafenses is to be identified with the Islamic city Tell-Fafan in the Middle Ages (Türker, 2012: 72). The *Equites Pafenses* are recorded in the *Notitia Dignitatum Oriens* as the garrison of Assara in Mesopotamia (ND Or. 36.26).

(Figure 32) (Algaze, 1989: 254). The fortifications on the eastern and northern sides of the site, however, are less-well preserved, presumably because of the modern occupation on the site (Algaze, 1989: 254).

Large-scale excavations in Çattepe begun in 2009 and thus much more information has been recorded. The excavations have been conducted by Dr. Haluk Sağlamtimur from Ege University, despite an interruption in 2010 because of the expropriation issue of the area (Sağlamtimur, 2012: 114). Following a four-year-effort by the members of the excavation team the large fortification walls of Tilli have been unearthed, especially over a length of ca. 200 m. in the western part facing the Tigris River (Figure 33). The walls of Tilli were mainly made of black basalt and were restored in different periods (Sağlamtimur and Türker, 2012: 69). Among the architectural elements one of the most remarkable constructions is the evidence for a riverside port (Figure 34). This was found during the 2009-2010 seasons to the southwest of the site, where a building best seen as a riverside storehouse has been unearthed (Sağlamtimur, 2010: 119, 2012: 73, and 2013: 137).

Roman pottery found in the fields on the northern side of Çattepe village indicates that the settlement not only consisted of the visible fortified site but also extended to the north (Velibeyoğlu et al., 2002: 794). The excavation results from Çattepe supported the idea that it was a very important part of the Late Roman military defences in the East in the fourth century (Sağlamtimur and Türker, 2013: 70). The coins obtained during the excavations indicate that the site was also mainly under Sasanian influence both culturally and politically after the fourth century (Figure 35) (Sağlamtimur, 2012: 71). Thus, it would seem likely that the fort was handed over by

Jovian to the Persians in 363 together with the other 14 fortresses of the ‘Transtigritane provinces’ mentioned in the contemporary literature (Comfort, 2008a: 327).

One of the important finds of Çattepe is the inscribed altar which was recorded there by Lightfoot and his colleagues, having been found by one of the villagers of modern Çattepe “while digging a channel in the bank below the walls on the west side of the site” (Figure 36) (Lightfoot and Healey, 1991: 1). The altar was rescued from the village and removed to the archaeological museum in Diyarbakır. It is free-standing today but it had probably once been set into a hollow base for cult practices (Lightfoot and Healey, 1991: 2).

The altar, which was dedicated to Zeus Olympius by a Roman veteran Antonius Domitianus, is inscribed on both sides, one in Greek and the other in Aramaic (Kennedy, 1988: 325). It is the first Roman military inscription which is securely recorded from the Tigris region (Freeman and Kennedy, 1986: 79-81). Lightfoot argues that the altar is of special interest because dedications of soldiers to Zeus Olympius are rarely found (Lightfoot and Healey, 1991: 2).

Lightfoot and Healey, taking into consideration the Greek letter-forms³⁴, have put forth the hypothesis that perhaps the dedication to Zeus Olympius might have become popular after the emperor Hadrian took the title of ‘Olympius’ in 128, and thus date the altar to the second quarter of the second century. They argue that this veteran might have served during Trajan’s Parthian War (Lightfoot and Healey, 1991: 6; Lightfoot, 1990: 123-124). However, French (1989) prefers another hypothesis that the veteran might have served during Severus’ Parthian Wars because the name of

³⁴ For the letter-forms see Mitford and Nicolaou (1974: 173).

Domittianus should have been the name of a non-citizen recruit in one of Severus' *Legiones I-III Parthicae* in the east (Lightfoot and Healey, 1991: 6) where they formed a garrison in the new Mesopotamian province (Smith, 1972: 486). Nevertheless, Lightfoot prefers to regard Domittianus as a Romanized native serving in the army during the early third century. In any case, the altar is the only confirmed inscription of a Roman soldier found on the Tigris (Comfort, 2008a: 327).³⁵

4.1.1.2 *Eski Hendek (Bezabde?)*

Another noteworthy discovery in Algaze's survey is Eski Hendek, possibly to be identified with Bezabde. The site contains earthworks and some ruins consisting of a number of massive structures and is situated 13 km north-west of Cizre (Algaze, Hammer and Parker, 2012: 242; Çevik, 2011: 20). The site is also the fourth riverside city of the Upper Tigris basin after Diyarbakır (Amida), Hasankeyf (Cepha) and Çattepe (Tilli) (Lightfoot, 1986: 517). Algaze argues that these ruins represent a Roman military installation in the region and its location matches both Strabo's and Ammianus Marcellinus' description of Bezabde (Figures 37-38) (Algaze, Hammer and Parker, 2012: 42). The remains occupy the graded terraces overlooking the east side of the Tigris River, and overlook the indigenous fort at Fenik (*Phaenicha?*)³⁶ (Figures 39-40) (Algaze, Hammer and Parker, 2012: 42). Only the eastern walls of the fortification of

³⁵ It is to be noted that a Latin inscription recorded on the west bank of the Tigris by a British engineer in 1943 but not seen since is perhaps comparable to the Tilli example (Kennedy, 1988: 101-103). It is claimed to have an image on it, probably an eagle in relief, and below this the Latin words *occuli* (sic) *legionum* (Kennedy, 1988: 101-103). Together with the Çattepe example, Isaac argues that this evidence "show that Roman units were based right on the Tigris" (Isaac, 1990: 40).

³⁶ When the Tigris became a border between Rome and Persia, the site of Fenik was incorporated into a late Roman military installation and it thus extended the Roman existence to the west bank of the river. See Algaze et al. (2012: 8-11 and 42-44).

Eski Hendek are visible on the area today, as river erosion had destroyed the all northern part of the fortification (Figures 41-42) (Comfort, 2008a: 24). The outlines as shown on the aerial views and plans match those of Roman forts of the Imperial period in Europe. It has not yet been examined archaeologically and its identification as Roman depends on its regular form and the coins and the pottery seen there.³⁷

4.1.1.3 Üçtepe (*Charcha/Arcaiapis*)

The mound of Üçtepe is located on the west bank of the Tigris, 40 km southeast of Diyarbakır city, and it is one of the largest mounds of the Upper Tigris Basin (Figure 43) (Özfiat, 2012: 117). The first research on Üçtepe was done by J.G. Taylor in 1865³⁸, who was the British Consul in Diyarbakır (Taylor, 1865: 22). Excavations at Üçtepe have since then been conducted by Prof. Dr. Veli Sevin but only for four years between 1988 and 1992 (Figure 44). During the excavations of 1991, a wall line following a north-south direction and consisting of basalt-like stones was located (Sevin, 1993: 177). This wall line was presumed to be the remains of the fortification wall which Taylor had earlier seen and dated to the Parthian Period (Taylor, 1865: 22; Sevin, 1993: 178).

On the eastern side of the mound, within one of the garbage pits, fragments of a conical iron helmet with ear guards were found (Sevin, 1993: 178). This conical helmet is ca. 2-3 mm thick and made of plaques and decorated with linear motifs³⁹ (Figure 45). It has been dated to the third or fourth century (Sevin, 1993: 178). However, it is not a

³⁷ The coins and pottery have not been properly published.

³⁸ See Chapter 1.

³⁹ For the definition: Waurick, 1983: 38, 39/5; 52/3 in Sevin (1993: 178).

Roman type and is more probably Sasanian. Additionally, during the excavations at Üçtepe 23 coins have been found (Sevin, 1993: 178). While the earliest ones are directly attributed to the Armenian king Tigranes the Younger, the other 18 are Roman coins dated from the first to the fourth century⁴⁰ (Tekin, 1992: 43, 48-51), although the full details of these have not yet been published (Figure 46).

The site has also produced part of a Latin inscription with three surviving lines of text (Figure 47) (Sevin, 1993: 178). These are incomplete and the exact interpretation of the text is problematic, although it may be that the text is military in origin as Latin inscriptions outside of military sites are rare in the general region (Lightfoot and Healey, 1991: 2). The Roman levels at the site have also produced fine quality Roman materials and might provide much more archaeological and epigraphic finds if investigated further⁴¹, but unfortunately the excavations at Üçtepe finished in 1992.

4.1.2 The Upper Tigris Archaeological Research Project (UTARP) (1998-2008)

The Upper Tigris Archaeological Research Project (UTARP) is one of the noteworthy archaeological excavation and survey project on the Upper Tigris Basin conducted by Prof. Bradley Parker and his colleagues between 1998 and 2008. In 1998 several archaeological sites in the east of Diyarbakır which were previously recorded by Algaze and his colleagues were visited (Algaze 1989; Kolars and Mitchell 1992). In 1999 the UTARP team conducted salvage excavations and intensive surveys in and

⁴⁰ Marcus Aurelius, Severus Alexander, Gordian III, Probus, Numerian and Constantine the Great are some who are identified on these coins. See Tekin (1992: 47-51).

⁴¹ Although not directly attributed to Üçtepe finds, Diyarbakır Museum contains a large collection of Roman glass objects from the first to the fourth century, obtained by way of purchase, which some believe to have come from the site or its vicinity. They have been studied by Dr. Gürol Barın from Dicle University (Barın 2007: 196-207); see Figure 48. For other finds of Roman Glass from the Tigris see Lightfoot (1993: 89-98).

around the sites of Boztepe and Talavaş Tepe (Figure 49). However, the main focus of this project was the large multi-period mound of Kenan Tepe⁴² which will be inundated soon by the Ilısu dam. None of these sites, however, was evaluated in terms of their classical heritage, at least there is no recorded information yet, except for the Hellenistic pottery and small finds found during Boztepe survey (Parker et al., 1999: 568).

4.1.3 The Excavations of the Cathedral complex at Nusaybin (Nisibis?)

Nisibis, which can be located at or about the location of modern Nusaybin, situated immediately north of the modern Turkish-Syrian border (Figure 50), was an important military, commercial and intellectual centre in the borderland between Rome and Persia in Late Antiquity (Keser-Kayaalp and Erdoğan, 2013: 137). Despite its strategic importance, however, no archaeological excavation has been possible in search of evidence for the place on account of the local political situation and security measures, around modern Nusaybin. This security situation is now improved and over the past 12 years a large excavation has been conducted in and around the cathedral complex at the southern edge of modern Nusaybin under the supervision of the Diyarbakır Museum⁴³ (Figures 51-52). The works on the cathedral complex began as an attempt to establish the building phases of the Church of Mor Yaqub (or Church of St James) which is part of the original cathedral complex.⁴⁴ This building, which is the oldest standing building devoted to Christian worship, was originally the baptistery for

⁴² The UTARP team members conducted salvage excavations at Kenan Tepe between 2000 and 2007 and the results of this project contributed to “the on-going debate about the formation and mutation of culture in frontier zones” Parker et al. (2002: 613-643).

⁴³ In 2002 the Mardin Museum published a short report about the excavation results on the museum’s website (<http://www.mardinmuzesi.gov.tr>)

⁴⁴ It was built by Bishop Yaqub (308–338) between 313 and 320 (Keser-Kayaalp and Erdoğan, 2013: 140).

the Cathedral, and was later converted to a church (Figure 53), probably after the Cathedral became ruined (Keser-Kayaalp and Erdoğan, 2013: 152). According to the evidence, it has always been associated with the Syrian Orthodox community, and it has been in continuous use as a church except for a brief period in the 19th century when it was used by the Ottoman army as a storage place (Bell, Mundell Mango, 1982; Keser-Kayaalp and Erdoğan, 2013: 140, 152).

The cathedral complex is the only part of modern Nusaybin to have been the subject of scientific excavation. In fact although ancient Nisibis was the official market center for trade between Rome and Persia from Diocletian's time onward (Keser-Kayaalp and Erdoğan, 2013: 137), the archaeological data is still not precise enough to identify the exact location of the ancient city. However, what evidence there is suggests that the ancient city might actually have been located at or around the present border post between Turkey and Syria.⁴⁵ Additionally, we need to be aware that early Christian churches, such as the Cathedral complex at Nisibis, often developed outside the limits of their ancient city and on the site of cemeteries where early Christian martyrs were buried. This is the case at St. Peter's in Vatican City, Xanten in Germany, and St. Albans in England. This might have been the case at Nisibis, which means that the ancient city is located elsewhere. The point is that more work needs to be done in and around Nusaybin to determine the exact location of Nisibis.

⁴⁵ Other few remains from Nisibis include some columns with Corinthian capitals standing in the no-man's land on the modern border between the cities of Syrian Qamışlı and Turkish Nusaybin (Bell, Mundell Mango 1982: pl. 68).

4.1.4 The Salvage Project of the Archaeological Heritage of the Ilisu and Carchemish Dam Reservoirs (1998-2008)

Perhaps one of the most crucial researches related to the Upper Tigris Basin is the Salvage Project of the Archaeological Heritage of the Ilisu and Carchemish Dam Reservoirs aimed at defining both the historical and cultural heritage of the region. When the Turkish Government implemented important developments for southeastern Turkey with the GAP project by constructing a large number of dams on the Euphrates and Tigris rivers and their tributaries in the late 1980s,⁴⁶ this survey project aimed to get information from the sites which will be inundated by the dams and which will be beneficial to broaden the knowledge of future generations (Figure 54). In this respect, in 1998 rescue operations began in the Ilisu and Batman Dam Basins and were coordinated by METU's *Centre for Research and Assessment of the Historic Environment* (TAÇDAM).

4.1.4.1 Hasankeyf (Cepha/Cephas)

The most important contribution of this salvage project to the region's archaeology is undoubtedly the Hasankeyf (Cepha/Cephas) excavations. Hasankeyf is a unique mediaeval city preserving important traces from the Roman, Byzantine and Islamic periods (Figure 16) (Ahunbay and Balkız, 2009: 3). It is claimed that before 363 Cepha was the capital of the Armenian province of Arzanene (for a while) and later was the base of the prefect of the *Legio II Parthica* (Comfort, 2008a: 42).

⁴⁶ See Kollars and Mitchel (1991) *The Euphrates River and the Southeast Anatolia Development Project*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press.

The salvage excavation at Hasankeyf was begun under the directory of Dr. Oluş Arik from Ankara University in 1986 but was suspended in 1991 because of the PKK activities in the region (Ahunbay, 2006: 1). In 1998, within the scope of the Salvage Project of the Archaeological Heritage, the excavations restarted under the directory of Arik. Since 2004 the director of the excavations is Dr. Abdüsselam Uluçam. He recently reported that the oldest monumental structures of the site belong to a Roman garrison which was constructed in the fourth century (Uluçam, 2008: 15-17). Hasankeyf was one of the key points on the river Tigris for defending the area against the Persian attacks and exactly for this reason a fortification was constructed here by the emperor Constantius II (337-361) together with the fortress of Rhabdion (Hatem Ta'i) (Honigmann, 1935: 3).

The remains of the Late Roman Period, however, are represented by few elements because the site mostly stands out with its mediaeval remains today (Arik, 2011: 805-807). During the excavations of 2005, the foundations of a Roman gateway were identified to the southwest of Hasankeyf Bridge (Uluçam, 2007a: 78-79 and 2013: 381). The gate was constructed by overlaying stone blocks on the bedrock but today it is barely preserved because of the later attachments of various architectural elements (Figure 55) (Uluçam, 2013: 381). Another noteworthy structure which has been excavated since the 2005 season is the Great Palace in the Upper Town. Today only the northern walls composing long narrow corridors are standing (Figures 56-57). The palace is thought by some to be the original Roman military garrison building which was designed for the guards unit as a shelter (Uluçam, 2013: 390, 395). During the 2006 season a row of shops was found along a road in the Upper Town; comprising of 52

shops in total, the first six, built of blocks of cut stone and barrel-vaults, belong to the Roman period (Figure 58) (Uluçam, 2008: 15-17 and 2013: 387). Finally, during the 2007 excavations, Roman mosaic fragments were discovered *in situ* on the east, west and north walls of a room located east of the Roman Gate to the south of the Er-Rızk Mosque (Uluçam, 2013: 388). The mosaics stones included blue, red, black, and white (Figure 59).

4.1.4.2 *Ziyaret Tepe (Diyarbakır)*

Ziyaret Tepe is a site with evidence of Assyrian occupation located on the southern riverbank of the Tigris (Matney, 1999: 547). It was discovered during the surveys of Algaze's team in the late 1980s (Algaze, Brueninger, Lightfoot and Rosenberg, 1991: 175-240). Since 1998 excavations have been conducted on the site in connection with the forthcoming construction of the Ilısu dam. The current director of the excavation is Dr. Timothy Matney. Although the site has already produced some evidence from the later Roman period, these levels have been neglected and the current work is focused on only the Assyrian remains.

4.1.4.3 *Salat Tepe (Diyarbakır)*

Salat Tepe is one of the ancient settlements to be inundated by the Ilısu Dam. The site is located ca. 5 km to the north of the Tigris and 14 km from the centre of Bismil (Figure 60). Due to its strategic location between the highlands of eastern Anatolia and northern Mesopotamia, the site has revealed evidence for contact with both regions (Ökse, 1998: 333). It was researched for the first time during the surveys of G.

Algaze and his colleagues in 1989 (Algaze, Brueninger, Lightfoot and Rosenberg, 1991: 213). The current director of the excavations is Dr. Tuba Ökse from Kocaeli University. The ceramic assemblage of Salat Tepe indicates a settlement from the fourth century BC to the Byzantine Period (Algaze, Breuninger, Lightfoot, and Rosenberg, 1991: 175-240). In particular the predominance of Roman ceramics in this assemblage reveals that the site was one of the significant centres of the Tigris valley in the relevant period (Ökse, 1998: 337).

4.1.5 Other Excavations Connected with the Dam Construction that Have Produced Roman Material

4.1.5.1 *Kuriki Höyük (Batman)*

Kuriki Höyük lies at the strategic location that dominates the confluence of the Batman Su and the Tigris River (Figure 61). Excavations here have been conducted by Dr. Elif Genç from Çukurova University under the Mardin Museum Directorate since 2009. The Roman-Persian remains that were found during the excavations of the mound are represented by large administrative buildings, other structures and burials (Genç, Valentini, and D'agostino, 2013: 128). The administrative structures were built with mud-brick walls on a stone foundation, and had plastered floors, and a long corridor with six rooms on both sides of the corridor (Figures 62-63). Another rectangular building with a single room to the west of this building is presumably a storage area (Figure 62) (Genç, Valentini, and D'agostino, 2013: 128). Given the strategic location of the site it has presumably served as an outpost or station to control river transportation (Genç, Valentini, and D'agostino, 2013: 128).

4.1.5.2 *Gre Abdurrahman Höyük (Diyarbakır)*

Gre Abdurrahman Höyük is located in Bismil in the southeastern province of Diyarbakır. The site lived its greatest period of prosperity in the first Assyrian Period and later in the Mediaeval Period (Coşkun, 2013: 140). In between the site was mainly used as a cemetery, the graves including late Roman or Byzantine burials (Coşkun, 2013: 140). The site was researched for the first time during the surveys of G. Algaze and his colleagues in 1989 (Algaze, Brueninger, Lightfoot and Rosenberg, 1991: 213). Excavations at Gre Abdurrahman Höyük have been conducted by Dr. Vecihi Özkaya from Dicle University under the Diyarbakır Museum Directorate since 2009. Although the architectural elements are very limited, the pottery assemblage from the upper layers of the mound includes examples of Hellenistic and Roman ceramics (Coşkun, 2013: 140).

4.1.5.3. *Ilısu Höyük (Mardin)*

Ilısu Höyük situated in the Dargeçit district of Mardin provides much more information about the Roman and Sasanian presence in the region. The excavations at Ilısu Höyük have been conducted by Dr. Tuba Ökse from Kocaeli University since 2009. Architectural elements of the site comprise a building surrounded by several other buildings including hearths and cooking ovens (tandır) inside them (Ökse, 2013: 148). On the northern side of the mound a Late Roman settlement was found. The settlement consists of regular planned buildings with square and rectangular rooms with stone foundation walls and is surrounded with walls including circular towers (Figures 64-65) (Ökse, 2013: 148). The reddish earth colour and burnt mud-brick traces in some

buildings indicate that the settlement was abandoned after a fire (Ökse, 2013: 148). Among the outstanding findings of Ilısı Höyük perhaps the most remarkable ones are two parade masks (one of iron and one of bronze) as yet unpublished but dated to the late second or third century which were used in military games by the soldiers (Figures 66-67). Regarding the location of the site, and the mask finds, one can presume that the site was occupied by the Roman military to control the Tigris Valley between the second and third century (Ökse, 2013: 143).

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

The provinces of Osroene and (Upper) Mesopotamia experienced frequent warfare between Rome and Persia from the late second to the early sixth century. Beside the military communications and hostile activities in each other's territory, however, the two sides also made contact via commercial, cultural, and social links. Here I will attempt to show how the activities in this region at this time and the construction of fortifications during this period of warfare modified the nature of the region in the relevant centuries, and how modern historical and archaeological works have contributed to understanding these modifications.

5.1. Definition and Function

Southern argues that there is no ancient source which clearly explains the meaning or the function of a frontier in all areas of the empire (Southern, 2001: 16). Therefore, it is not possible to make a single definition of 'What is a frontier?' for the whole Roman Empire particularly when different geographic and political conditions are concerned (Whittaker, 2004: 305). If the eastern frontier of the Empire was a single fixed and visible boundary line, then it would be easier to define the Roman conception

of the frontier. This could be done if the frontier was fixed on a river, like the Rhine. Where no river existed, Domitian and Hadrian built linear fortified boundaries to separate Roman from non-Roman (so-called Barbarian) territory in Europe and in Britain (e.g., Southern, 2001: 16). In the open steppe-like regions of the east, however, we find a different approach. For the Eastern limits of Syria and Arabia, Diocletian built a linear frontier that consists of a line of forts and fortlets not a linear wall or similar work (Kennedy and Riley, 1990: 24-35). Southern argues how a linear frontier, whether fortified or not, has not only a military function but a variety of other functions: “as custom barriers, intelligence bases, aids to police work inside and outside the provinces, fortified communication routes and, not least, the delimitation of Roman territory.” (Southern, 2001: 273).

No such visible linear boundary like Hadrian’s Wall, has been found in either Upper Mesopotamia or Osrhoene and it is generally agreed that such a type of defence was never used by the Romans in this area (Hodgson, 1989: 177-189). Nevertheless, for Comfort it is surprising that “the Romans did not apparently even consider a defensive wall at two points: the area between Dara and Nisibis and that between Rhabdion and Bezabde. (Comfort, 2008a: 233). Perhaps the reason was that these areas were vulnerable to small-scale Persian attack and were not easy to defend without using many troops in permanent bases. Comfort also argues, however, that in the warfare between Rome and Persia,⁴⁷ communications were particularly important for the planning of attacks and “for the assembly of troops to counter attacks.” (Comfort, 2008a: 229-230). In this not so rigid form of frontier which lacked a fixed visible line, the emphasis is on

⁴⁷ For the discussion see Dignas and Winter (2007: 205).

the legions in the frontier armies occupying the strategic positions at some distance behind the formal frontier between the two sides, and smaller units stationed in the forts nearer to it (Southern, 2001: 273). This is apparently the basis of the Diocletianic system in Syria (Kennedy and Riley, 1990: 24-35). Thus, military and public posts, roads and way stations were constructed in the region in order to maintain the frontier's permanency and allowed convenient transportation of supplies and heavy equipment. With the need for quick movement guaranteed against small or even large size threats the military could quickly deal with any problems without the need for a permanent linear barrier.

5.2 The Formation of the Frontier

In the region concerned here, the borders between the Early Roman Empire and the Parthians was drawn along the line of the Middle and Upper Euphrates long before the third century and hardly changed until the time of Septimius Severus. The river marked in this way a clear division between Roman and Persian. However, thanks to his expansionist policy and the establishment of two new provinces east of the Euphrates, the Tigris River for the first time became the Eastern border of Rome. From the third century onward, it was kept as the border by the various emperors, but especially by Diocletian, Constantius II, Julian, and Anastasius I, who were all greatly involved in the region.

Diocletian became involved because of his determination to restore the East to Roman control and because he saw the biggest threat to Rome coming from the Sasanians. Until then the Roman east had generally been neglected by the emperors,

despite it being subjected to “the depredations of Persian armies and disrupted by the Palmyrene insurrection” (Eadie, 1996a: 79). In 299, Diocletian made the Upper Tigris the official frontier between Rome and Persia which satisfied both sides as well as the Armenians (Eadie, 1996a: 562). The creation of this fortified frontier enabled the Romans to confine conflicts between themselves and the Persians to the region. The Persians had to wait until 363 before they were able to challenge the settlement of 299 and return the border region to a configuration that was acceptable to them. From that time onward, Diocletian’s successors in essence always used the same pattern when strengthening the frontier (Southern, 2001: 17 and 232).

Diocletian’s eastern defensive policy was persistently held to until the time of Julian (Isaac, 1990: 372). The activities of securing the frontier, in particular the fortification of Amida, Cephra and Tilli by Constantius II, demonstrate the strategic importance which this part of the eastern frontier had assumed along the Middle Tigris where it faces Sophanene and Arzanene (Lightfoot, 1986: 509, 519). After the disastrous defeat of Julian, both in military and political terms, his successors were aware of the fact that they should have been in more constructive cooperation with Persia regarding the frontier and areas of influence between the two sides, but this never became their policy (Isaac, 1990: 372). However, the last form of the frontier in the region which was established after that time (363), following the Tigris to the east of Hasankeyf and then south to Bezabde, did not change for many centuries despite some losses in each other’s territory by both sides (Comfort, 2008a: 235). Indeed, based upon all the evidence which was obtained during Algaze’s surveys, Whitby suggests that the existence of garrisons at

such strategic points prove the function of the Batman Su as a border between Romans and Persians after the fourth century (Whitby, 1983: 205).

5.3 Issues Arising

The accounts of Zosimus (2.34.1 cf. Dodgeon and Lieu, 1991) states that Diocletian developed a new strategy to provide advanced warnings of a Persian invasion by building fortresses on the frontier and by installing armies in them (Stauffenberg, 1931: 401; Ensslin, 1942: 54, 66). Some modern scholars reject that view. Isaac says that behind Rome's eastern defence system as set by Diocletian is an offensive rather than a defensive strategy of outlying provinces.⁴⁸ Eadie suggests that Diocletian's construction of roads and forts in the region did not signify a new strategy to deal with invading Persians or that the roads were meant to provide advanced warnings of a Persian invasion: rather, he suggests that Diocletian's roads heralded a return to peace and tranquillity in the region (Eadie, 1996a: 75).

The lack of Roman forts in northern Mesopotamia seems to support this view (Isaac, 1992: 267, 372). However, the strategically located cities were heavily fortified, whether they depended on defence for a legion based there or on a local militia to put off the Persians from attacking them. For example, Nisibis and Amida, whose defence was the responsibility of the local population, formed centres for resisting or hindering Persian attack, and support the view that in a sense they defended the border region (Comfort, 2008a: 230-231). In this case, there is no doubt that the fortresses and fortified cities, at least those built by Constantius II in the fourth century, indicate that they were

⁴⁸ In this sense of a defended frontier, it would be logical to consider his definitions of 'frontier zone' and *limes*. See Isaac (1990: 161 and 1998: 147).

not intended to defend a line but rather to defend and control the territory and infrastructure (Butcher, 2003: 62-63; Comfort, 2008a: 230). But it was also the great density of forts and fortified cities which made possible an offensive as well as a defensive function shows a heavily militarised region that was emphasising the common interest of both sides in preserving stable frontiers rather than open-ended war (Jones, 1958: 13).

Luttwak argues that Septimus Severus established a ‘scientific frontier’ in Northern Mesopotamia but this was not sufficient to prevent the Persian attacks of a generation later (Luttwak, 1976: 127-190). By the time of Diocletian conditions forced Rome to adopt a different strategy which would better protect the Eastern territories against attack by the external enemy (Williams, 1996: 93): mobile field armies and strongholds (stationary hard defended points) were the ‘backbone’ of this strategy. Luttwak explains how the “self-contained strong hold with mobile forces either between or behind them” provided a suitable defence system for the region, and describes these two elements as a new frontier strategy of “defence in depth” (Luttwak, 1976: 131).

Luttwak’s conclusions and interpretation of Roman ‘Grand Strategy’ resulted in considerable interest and encouraged debate among scholars of the Roman Empire and its frontier systems.⁴⁹ A main objection was that it was anachronistic: it was a concept of Roman frontier defence mainly based on his experience and knowledge of modern military strategy in the context of cold war Europe. Most Roman military scholars have argued that this concept cannot be applied to the Roman period, especially as there is no

⁴⁹ See Freeman and Kennedy (1986), Hanson (1989), Isaac (1988, 1990 and 1993), Ferrill (1991a and 1991b) and Whittaker (1996).

documentary evidence to prove such a strategy in the Roman frontier system. His ideas of a 'Grand Strategy' concept, however, have been accepted by some scholars as possibly or certainly applying to the Western part of the empire, with its system of using natural linear boundaries such as mountain ranges and rivers. It is not clear, however, if it can be applied to the Eastern frontier. Except that I do find his definition of an 'elastic defence' does apply to the region under study. An elastic defence does not have a fortified perimeter but operates with mobile forces that can move quickly to the relevant *schwerpunkt*.

There is also another critical question among scholars of Roman frontiers: "Did the Romans have a different policy and a different concept of frontier in the East from that in the West?" (Whittaker, 2004: 306). The catastrophic defeats of Crassus, Valerian, and Julian had proved to the Romans that the East was a different world from that of the West but this remains to be argued in modern scholarly works. In the course of the struggle with Persia, in order to better defend the eastern frontier the Roman Empire began to pay it greater attention and manpower than it did in the West (Whittaker, 2004: 307). A clear problem was the lack of a clear natural line that could serve as a common frontier like a river that divided the two sides, or desert regions marking the end of fertile territory. The Mesopotamia Plain was a funnel for attacks in either direction with no clear natural line to mark a limit to advance. In particular, this meant that for the conduct of foreign relations between both sides, especially after 363, the potential use of military power, offensive or defensive, using larger numbers of soldiers became of greater importance. Together with this was how the diplomacy between the two sides developed a number of ways to resolve the possibility of conflict. Central to this

diplomacy was the treaty, and especially during the fourth and fifth centuries it appears that treaties were taken with the utmost seriousness by their participants. Therefore, “they were a significant force for international stability during a most unstable period.” (Blockley, 1984: 29).

Whittaker suggests that despite a clear natural border there would have been an agreed administrative boundary in the East, legally negotiated, based on equality of the two sides and determined by political conditions rather than military (Whittaker, 2004: 306). Even so, it is difficult to support this idea with material evidence particularly when the limited archaeological background of the East is considered in comparison to the West. Also the knowledge of the Persian Empire during the Sasanian period is still very limited archaeologically. For example, in terms of commercial and cultural exchanges along the frontier, we know from the literary sources that mutual movements across the Roman-Persian border were common (Elton, 1996a: 131), and some cities were dependent on international trade such as Amida, Nisibis, and, at a later date, Dara. Nevertheless, there is no good available archaeological data evident for the trade in goods (Comfort, 2008a: 260).

Despite this deficiency, thanks to some recent works on the area, at least some old ideas about the eastern frontier have begun to change.⁵⁰ But the truth of the matter is that the evidence available is often only a very small or still undefined part of what once existed. Despite these terms, archaeological excavations in northern Mesopotamia have not yet yielded enough evidence of a large Roman military presence in the region,

⁵⁰ On the recent studies discussing the eastern frontiers of the Roman Empire see Kennedy (1982), Mitchell (1983), Gregory and Kennedy (1985), Freeman and Kennedy (1986), Kennedy and Riley (1990) and Isaac (1990).

although this is indicated by the literary records. For the East, the problem of available data is so much worse than for the West or even North Africa (Mitchell, 1983: 1; Kennedy, 1996: 15). “In the region of northern Mesopotamia warfare between Rome and Persia, both organized empires based on urban settlement, was also characterised by raiding of countryside and villages, but it was punctuated by major sieges of the cities and invasions by large armies” (Comfort, 2008a: 234). The limited archaeological record suggests that regardless of who controlled the region the actual impact on local people was not overwhelming (Foss, 2003: 149). Naturally it is far more efficient to use existing administrative structures than to destroy everything and begin anew.

As it is, because of the difficult security situation in this region, it is doubtful that any further comprehensive field research on the nature of this part of the Eastern frontier will be possible in the near future. For many years, the urban centres and the rural areas of eastern- and southeastern Anatolia have not been the subject of many scientific researches until the recently imposed development projects such as GAP. But we can think that the developments in agriculture and the huge growth of population and the necessary infrastructure for it in this area have certainly damaged or destroyed large numbers of sites in recent years.

On the other hand, the detailed fieldwork conducted in limited parts of the region has been made possible within the scope of the on-going dam projects, especially the Ilisu dam. Even though the surveys have in general been restricted to the areas that will be covered with water or affected by dam-related building projects, many potential sites have been identified. In fact it is true that many excavations associated with dam construction have been conducted recently in the area, but the emphasis has always been

on pre- and proto-historic sites, with the great exception of Islamic Hasankeyf. Even at those places which do contain Roman traces these have not received the attention that they deserve, the major exception being Tilli (Çattepe). What is really needed, however, is the detailed excavation of the Roman phases of known Roman sites such as Amida (Diyarbakır) and Cepha (Hasankeyf).

Until this change in attitude occurs, what this means is that study of the Middle Euphrates-Middle Tigris region must necessarily be incomplete, as what first seemed a very promising subject turned out to lack much of the data that was required. To be positive, however, this study does provide not just a history of the later Roman Empire with its militaristic stance towards its neighbours in the east for the period chosen, from Septimius Severus to Anastasius I, but does also place on records and reviews the recent relevant archaeological discoveries within this region. My aim was to set the development of eastern Roman policy in the Upper Tigris region within the context of both the available historical and archaeological data in an attempt to better understand late Roman military policy and diplomacy on the borders towards the Persians.

I have, however, not been able to do as much as was hoped for. Yet I hope to have shown if only from the written record that after the chaos of the third century “the Roman Empire emerged in a defensive posture which was effective” in the east (Blockley, 1992: 165). The period beginning with the treaty of 299 and ending with that of 363 saw the creation of a borderland which satisfied both the Persians and the Romans (Blockley, 1992: 1). However, in the conduct of foreign relations between Rome and Persia after 363 the potential use of military power, offensive or defensive, became of greater importance (Matthews, 1986: 560). Actual diplomacy between the

two sides developed a number of ways to resolve the possibility of conflict. But under Anastasius I, this area again became the flash-point for a major long-term struggle between the two sides, the one now based in Constantinople the other still at Ctesiphon. Once work began on the building of the fortress at Dara, and those along the Euphrates, then in was only a matter of time before active hostilities began between the two powers. And so we should look to the actions of Anastasius if we want to place the blame for the long series of wars that eventually, in the time of Heraclius, exhausted both sides, just as a third rival power was developing in the Arabian Peninsula, and so opened the region for the expansion of Islam.

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FIGURES

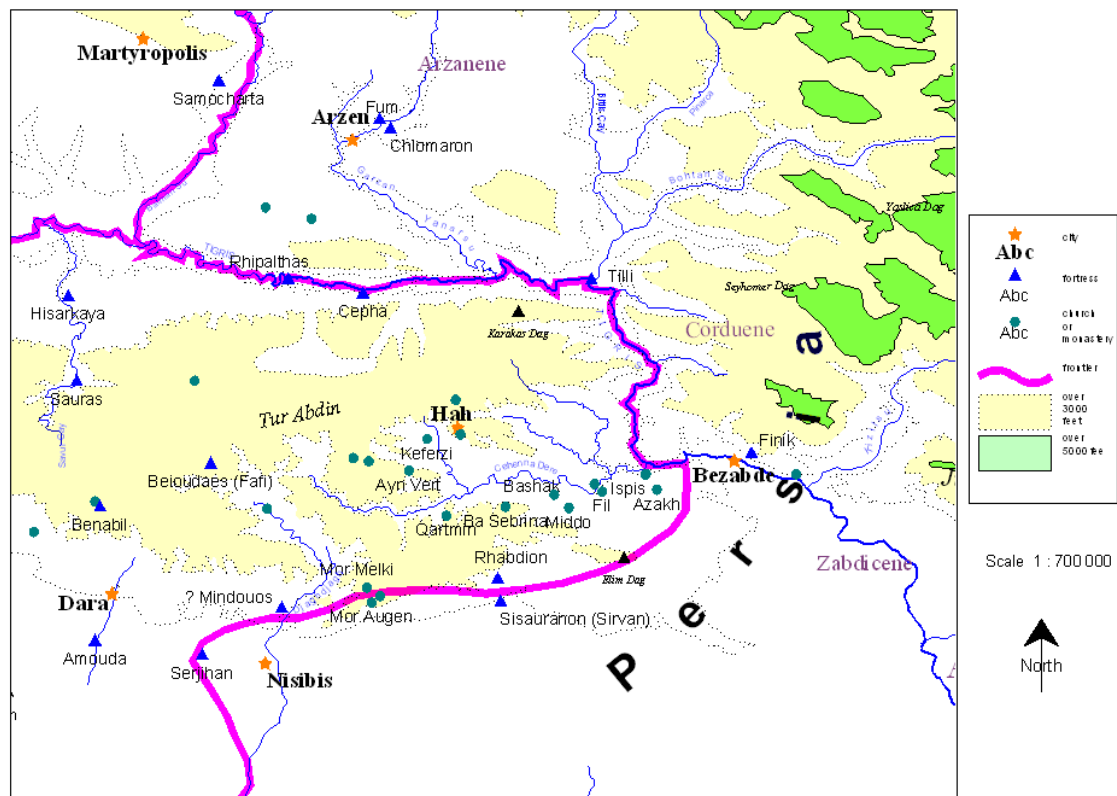


Figure 1: Comfort's view of the frontier after 363 (Comfort, 2008a: Fig. 24)

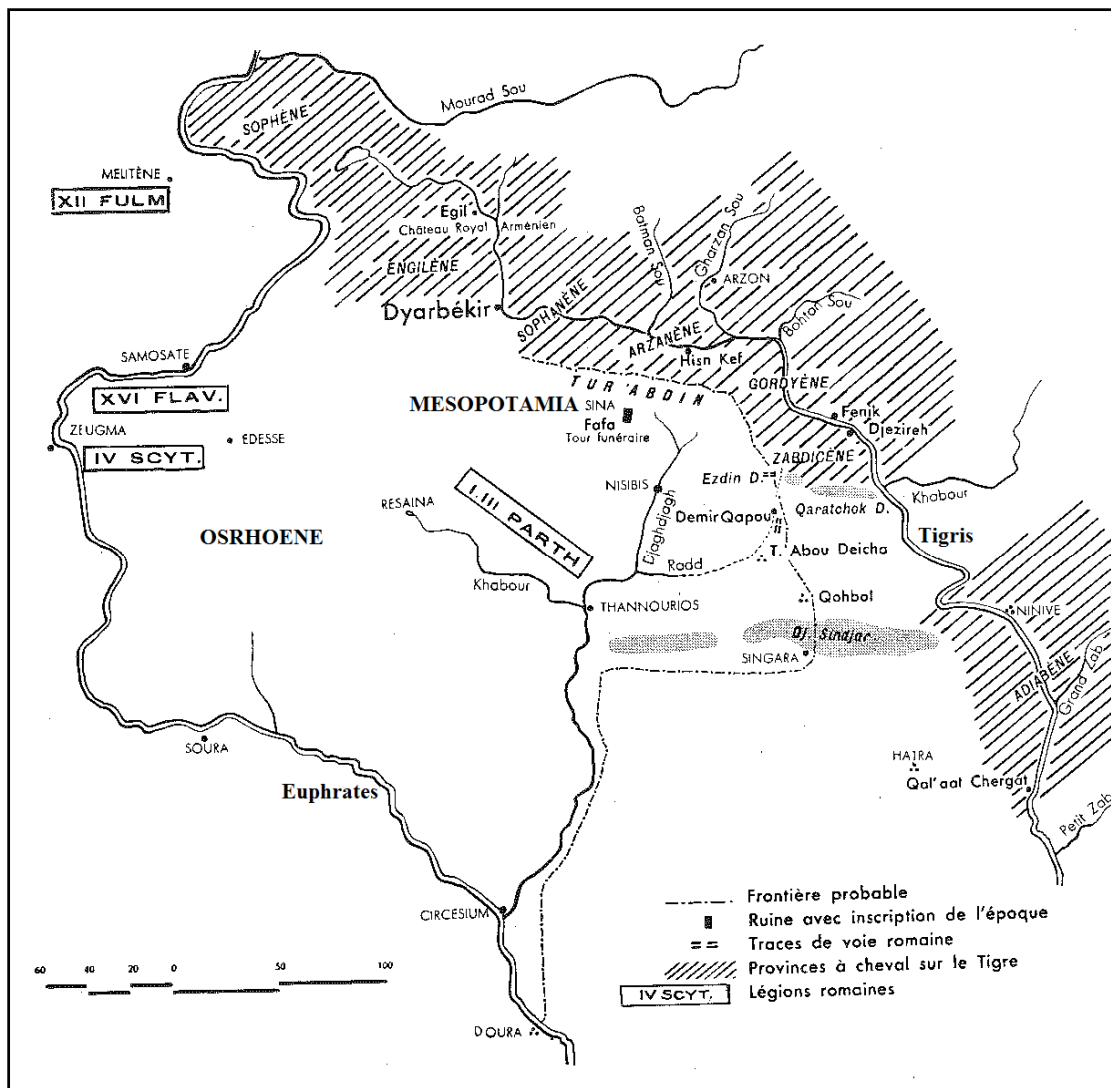


Figure 2: Roman provinces of Osroene and Mesopotamia (Dillemann, 1962: Fig. 28)

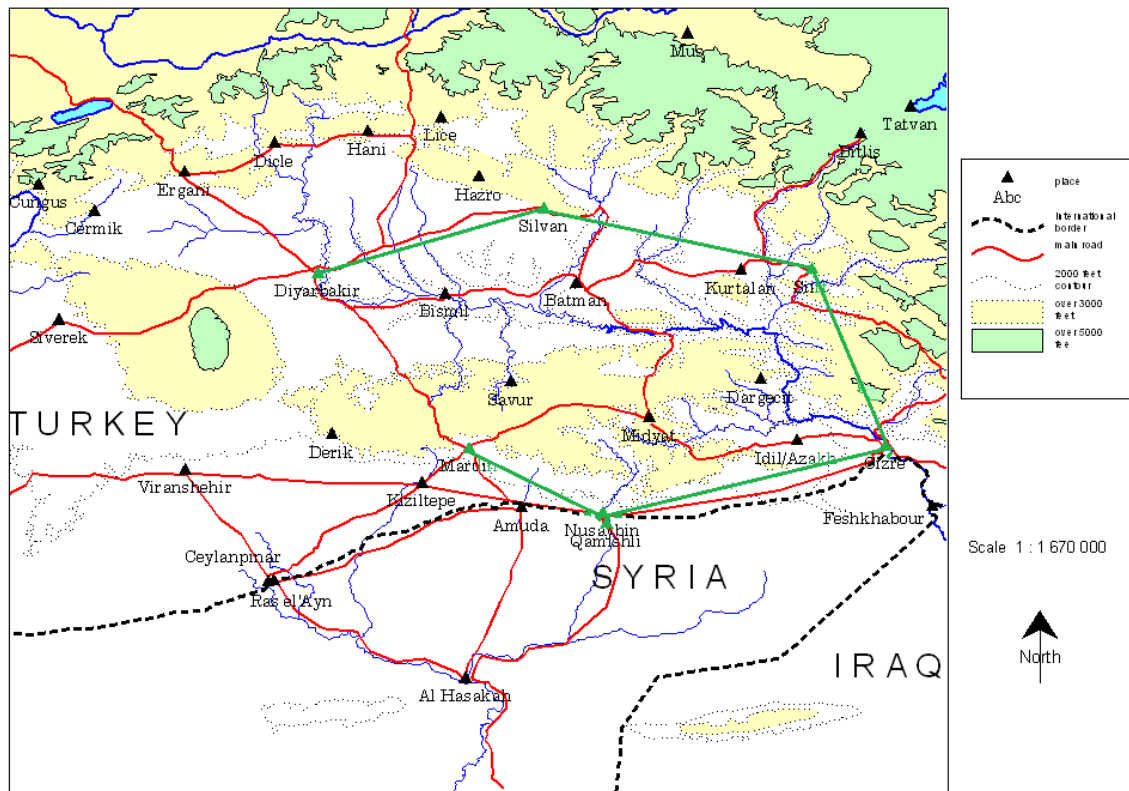


Figure 3: Modern towns and cities in the Upper Tigris Basin (Comfort, 2008a: Fig. 1)

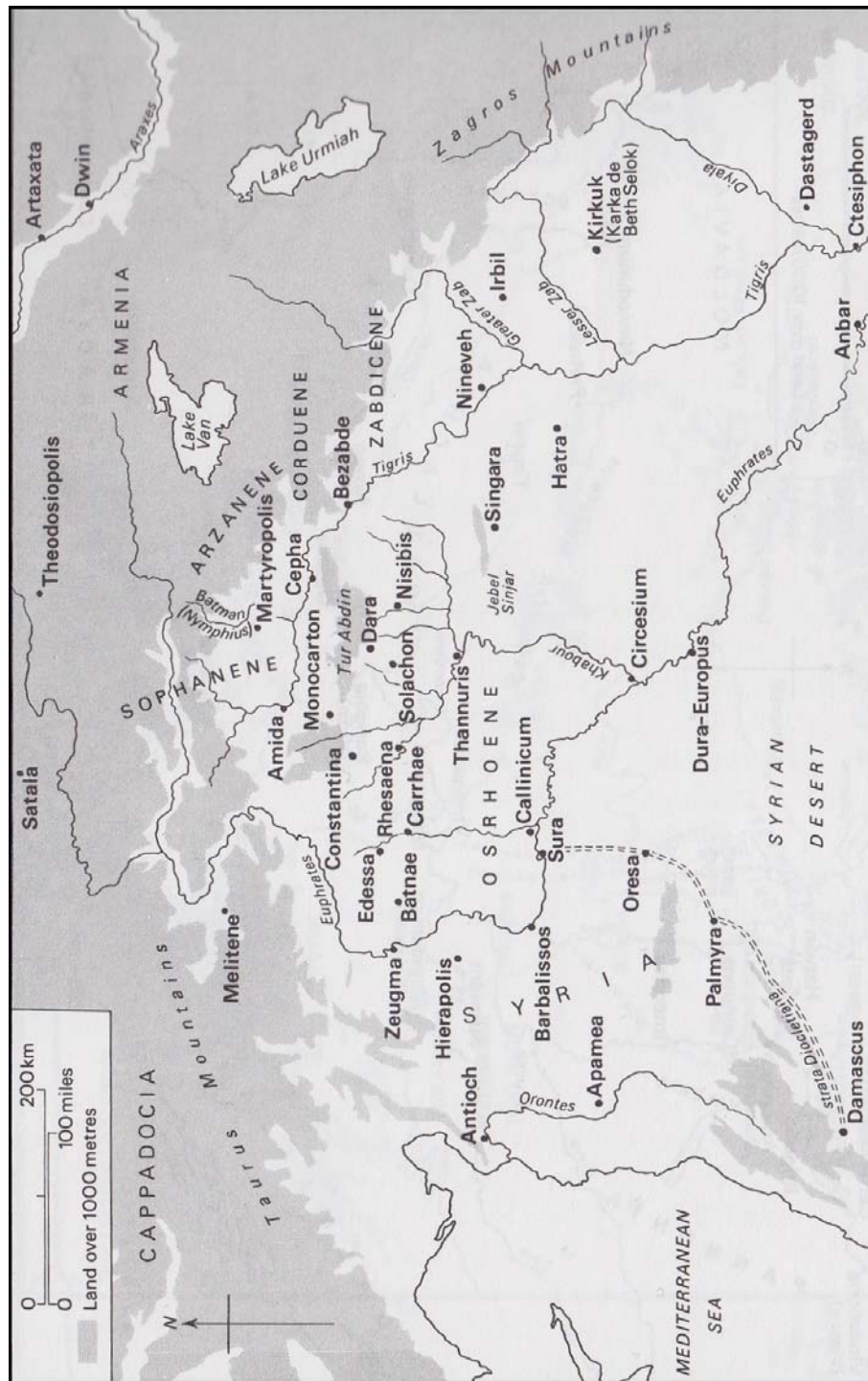


Figure 4: Northern Mesopotamia (Lee, 1993: Map 2)

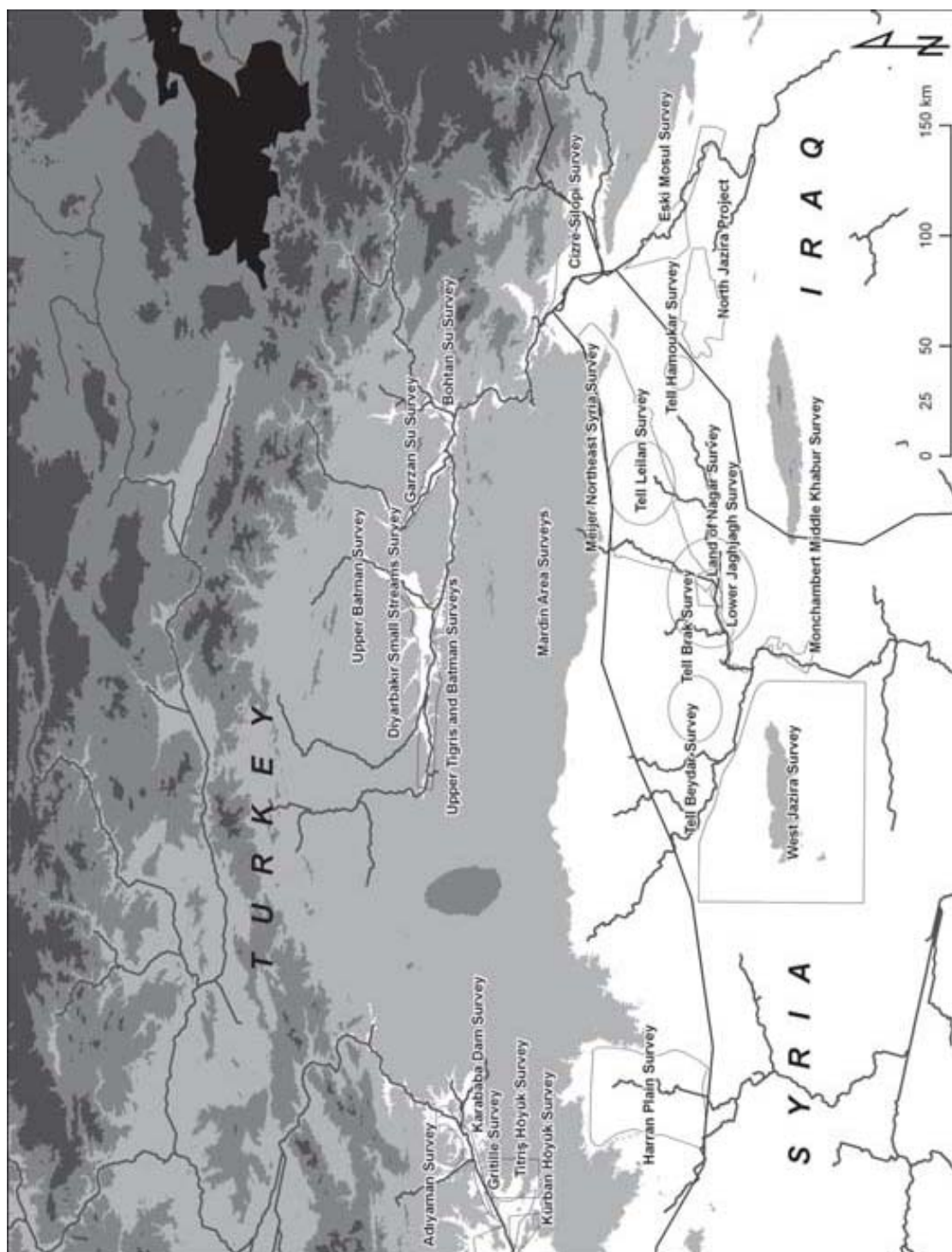


Figure 5: The Tigris-Euphrates Archaeological Reconnaissance Project survey areas in southeastern Turkey, northern Syria, and northern Iraq (Algaze et al., 2012: Fig. 2)

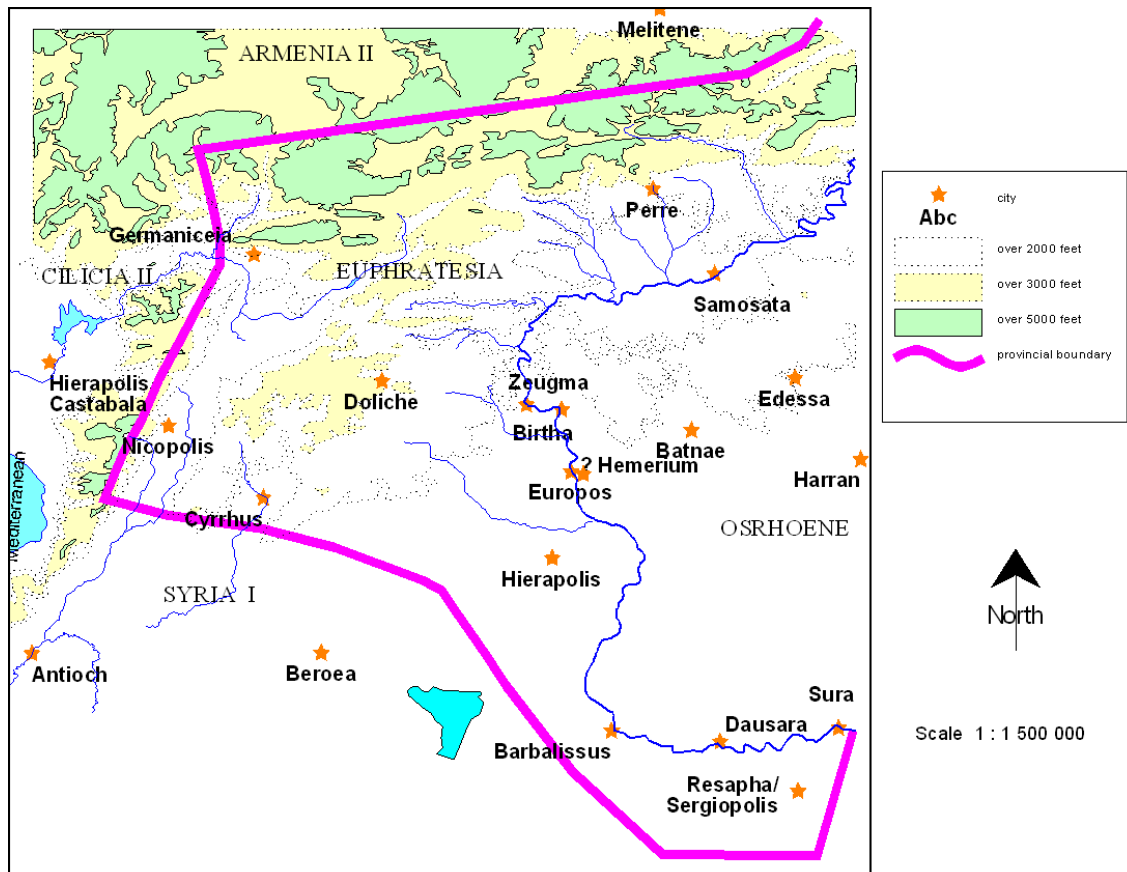


Figure 6: Roman provinces of Euphratesia and Osroene between 363 and 600
(Comfort, 2008: 26a)

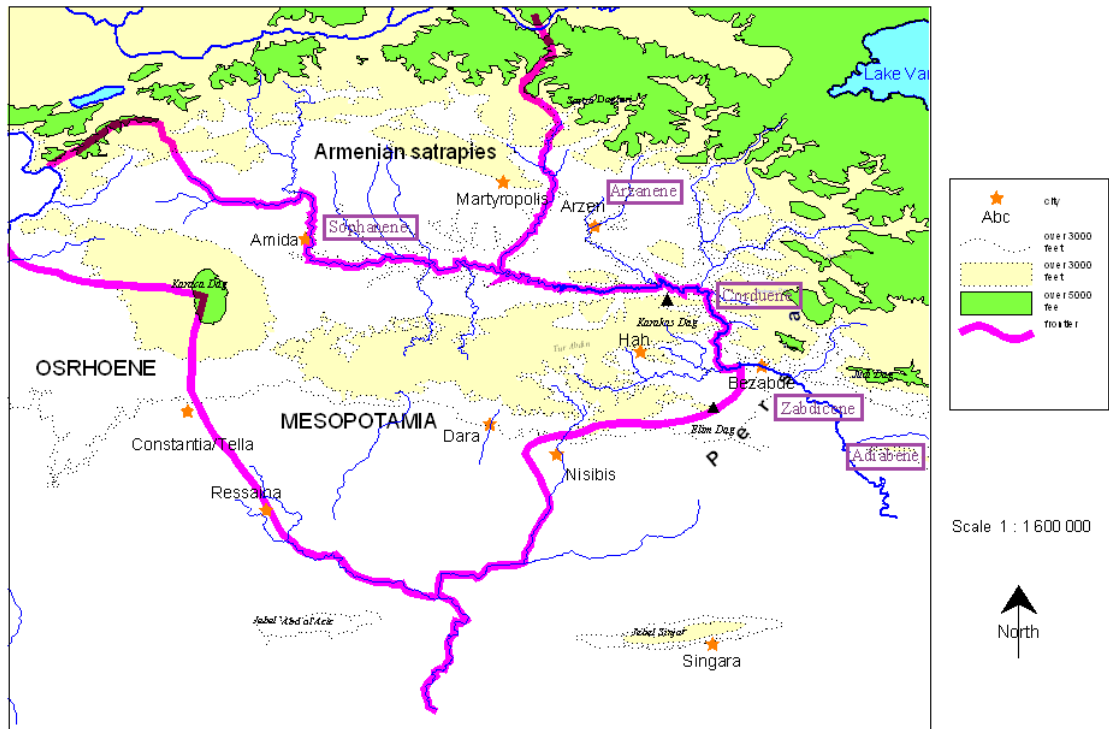


Figure 7: Roman province of Mesopotamia between 363 and 592
(Comfort, 2008: Fig. 26b)

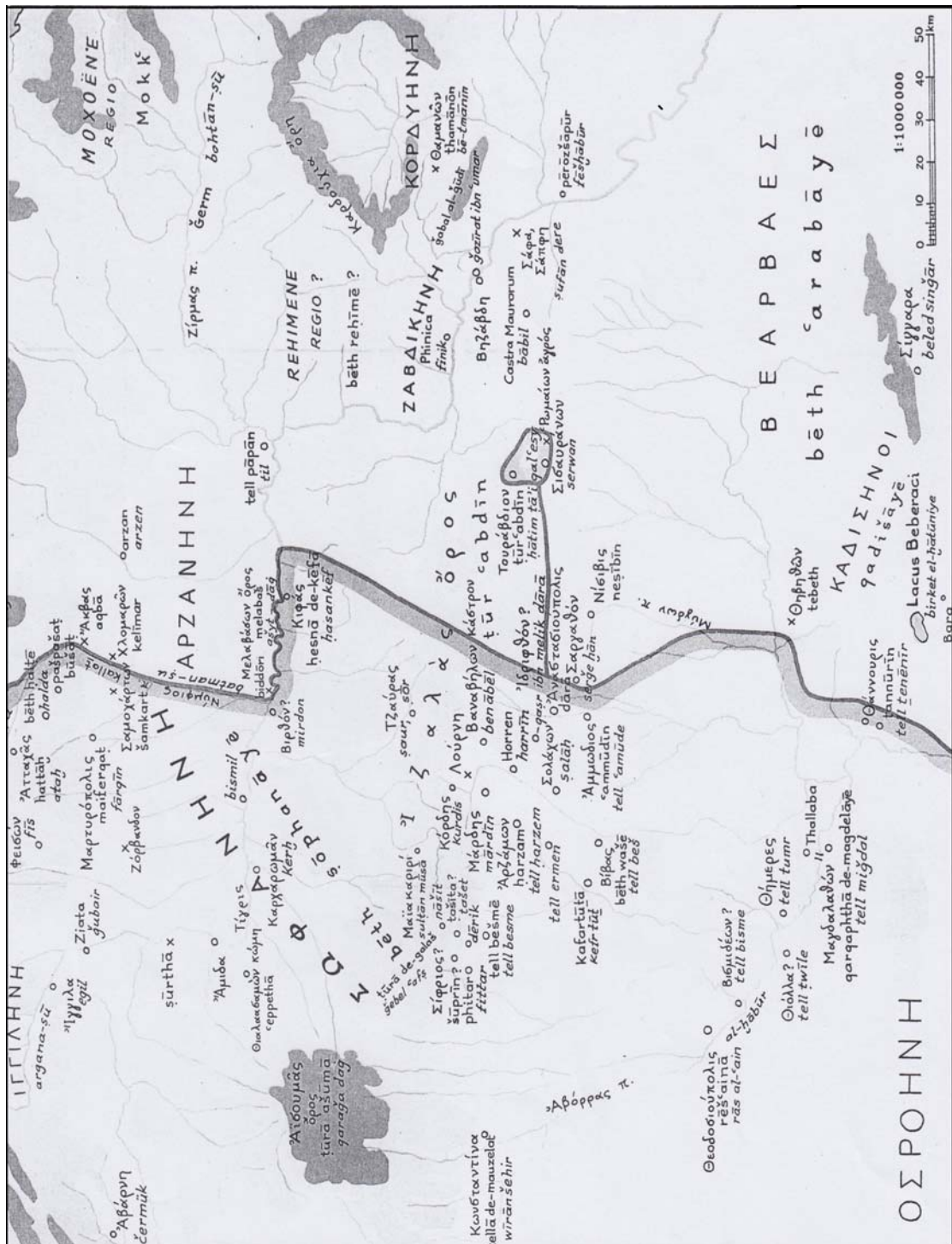


Figure 8: Honigmann's view of the frontier after 363 (Honigmann, 1935)

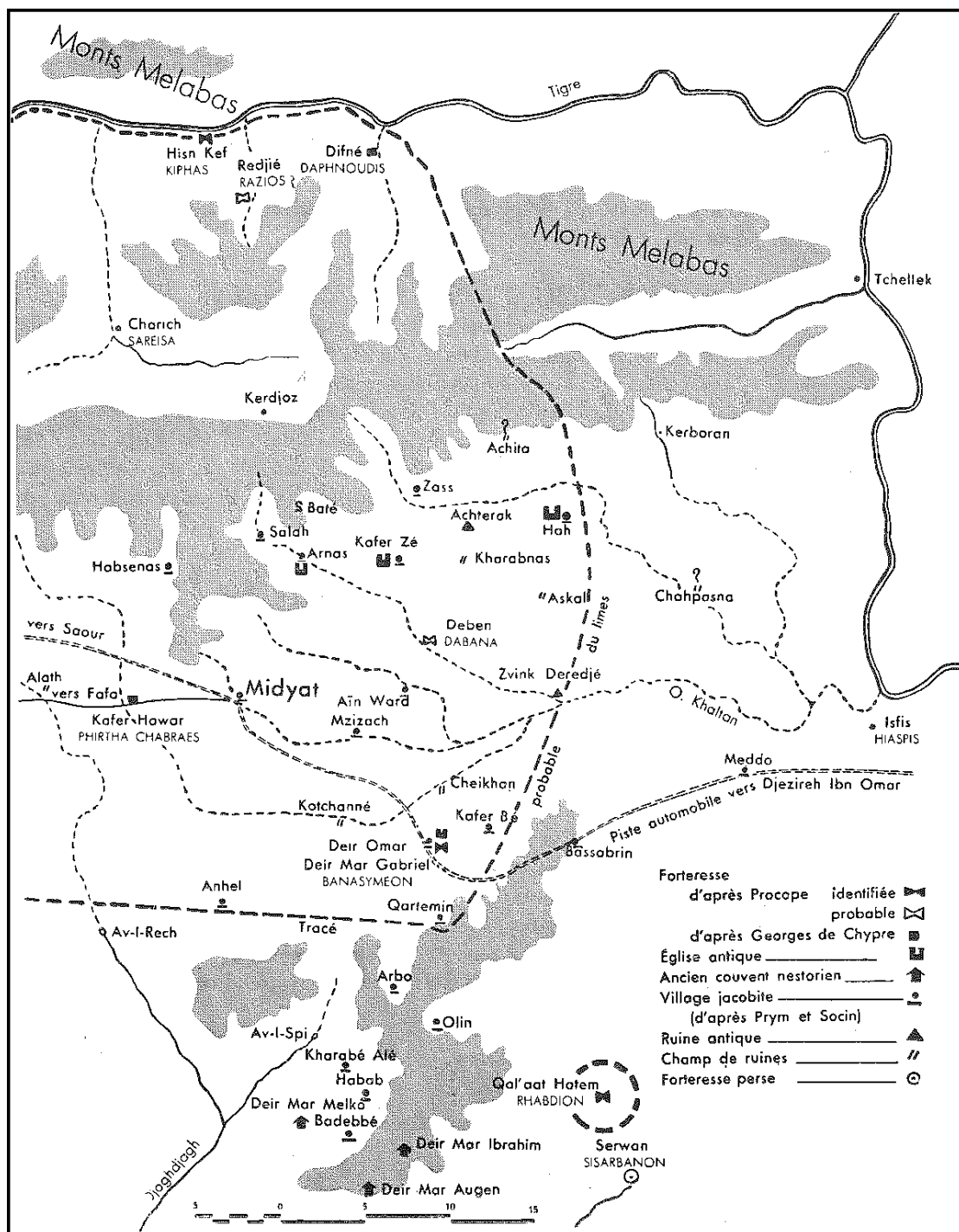


Figure 9: Dillemann's view of the frontier after 363 (Dillemann, 1962: Fig. 32)

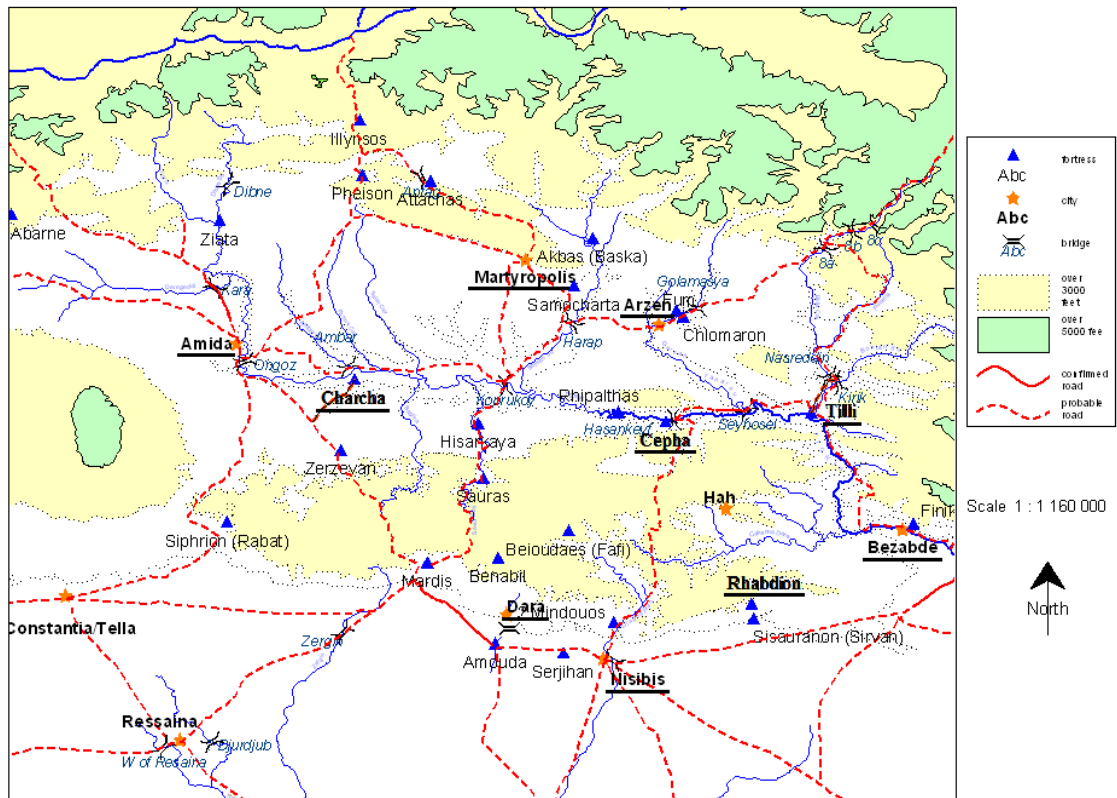


Figure 10: Late Roman fortresses and fortified cities in the Upper Tigris Basin (Comfort, 2008a: Fig. 19)

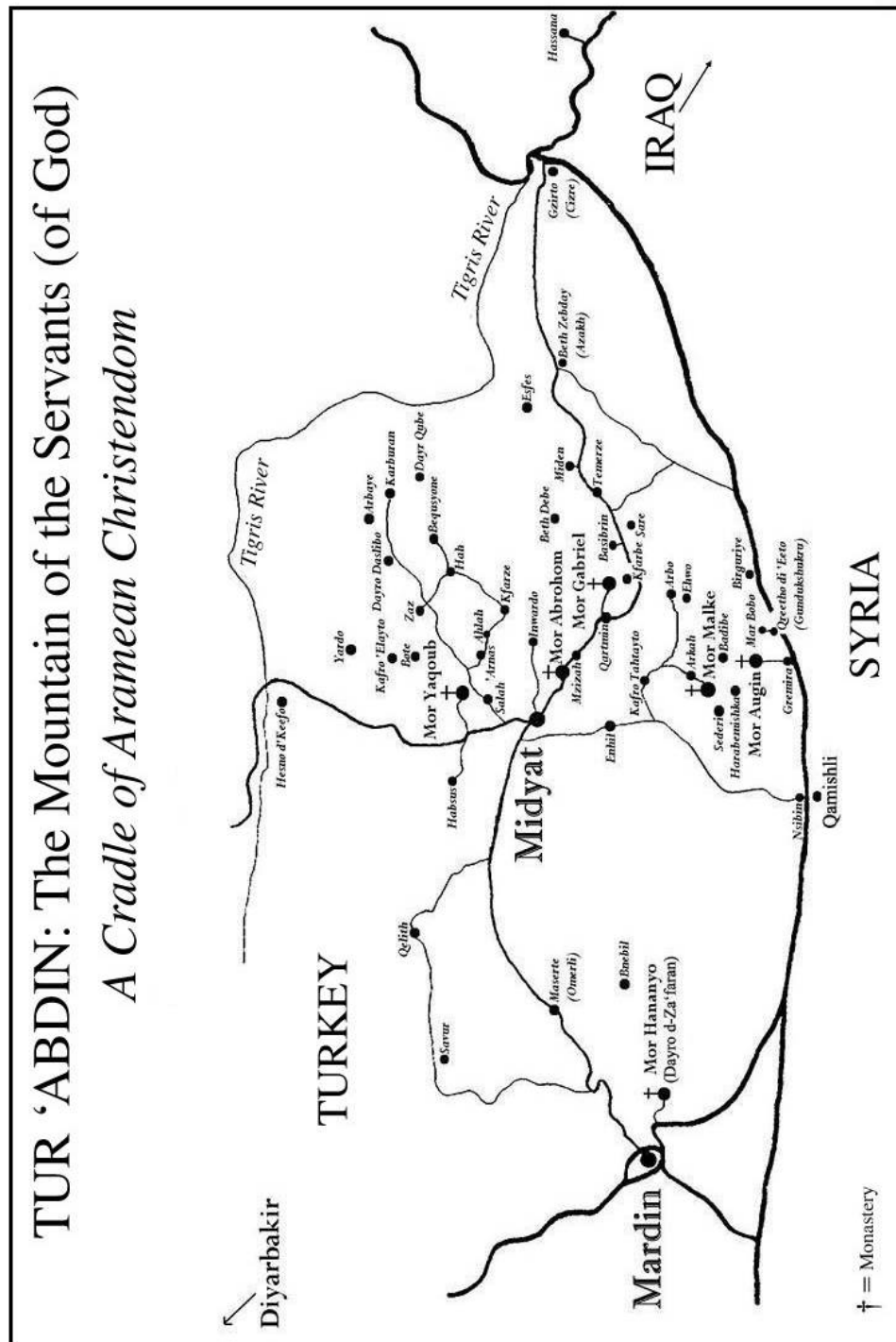


Figure 11: Tur Abdin region (the map adapted from <http://www.midyatcity.com>)



Figure 12: The walls of Diyarbakır
(the figure adapted from <http://walledtowns.com/towns/diyarbakir/>)

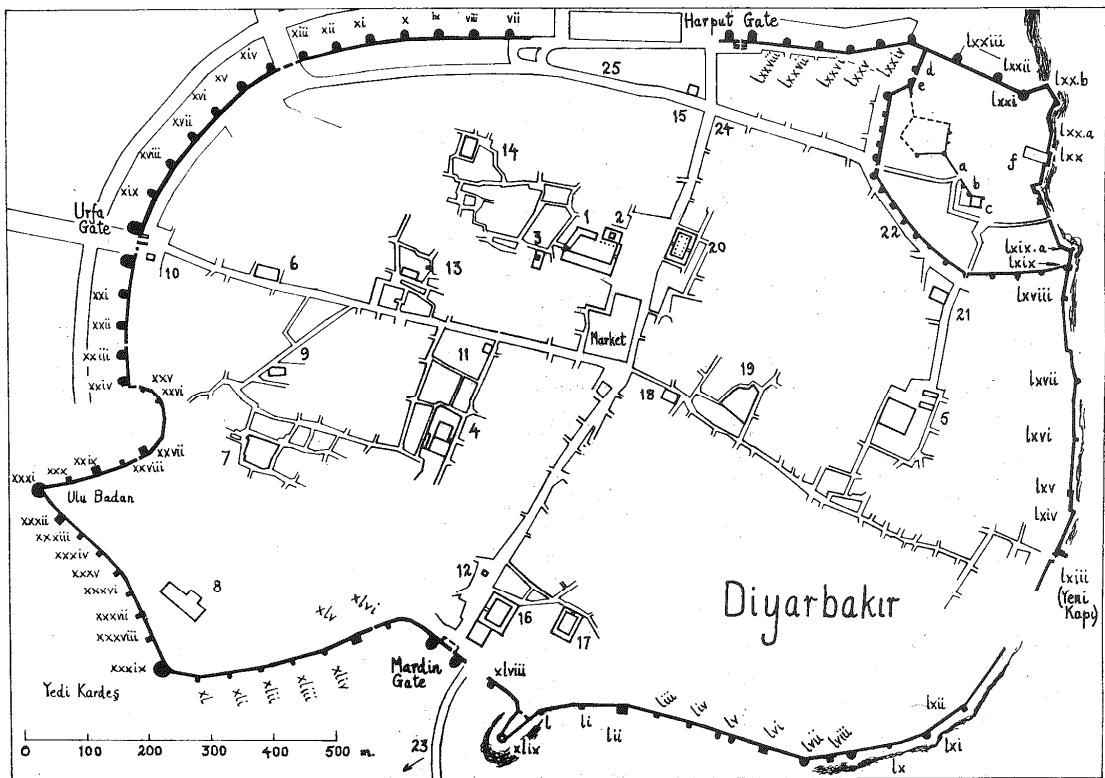


Figure 13: Diyarbakır, plan of the walled area (Sinclair, 1989: 165)



Figure 14: An aerial photo showing the location of Maipa (Silvan) (Comfort, 2008: 301)

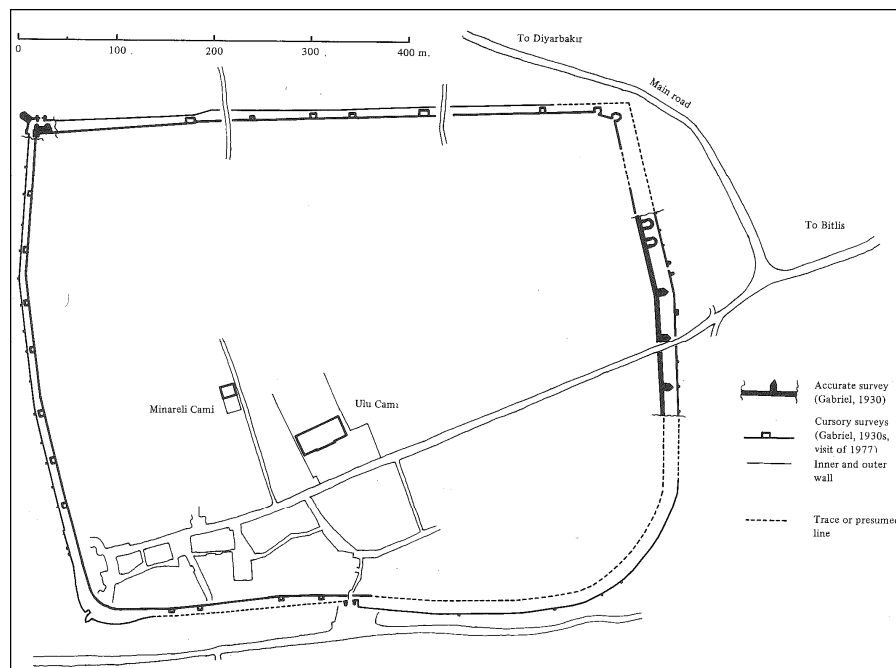


Figure 15: A sketch plan of the walls of Maipa (Silvan) (Sinclair, 1989: 163)



Figure 16: Hasankeyf, a general view of the Upper Town (Ahunbay and Balkız, 2009: 2)



Figure 17: An aerial photo showing the location of Eğıl (Comfort, 2008a: 288)

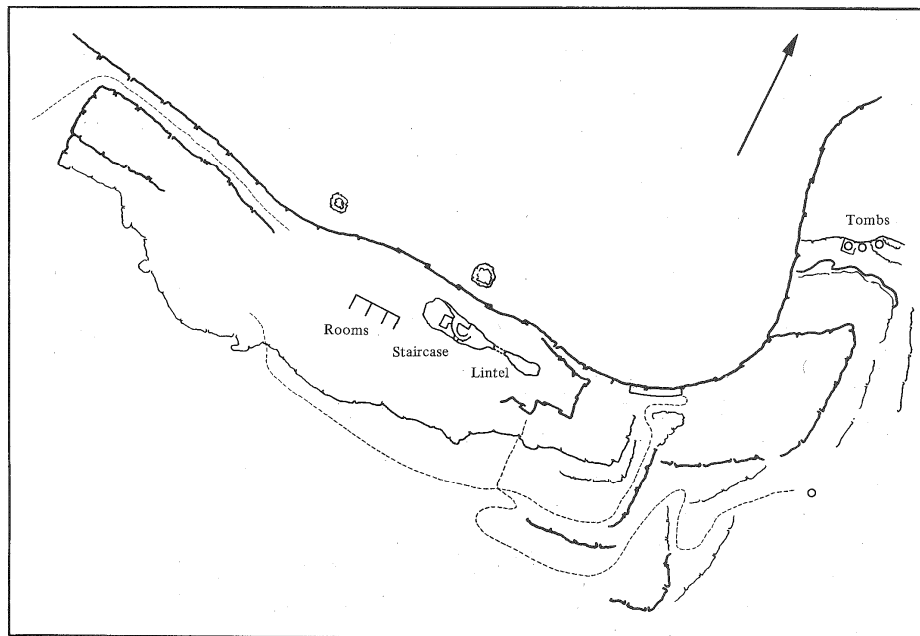


Figure 18: Eğıl, sketch plan of the citadel (Sinclair, 1989: 197)



Figure 19: An aerial photo showing the location of Eski Hendek (Bezabde?) (Çevik, 2011: Fig. 1)

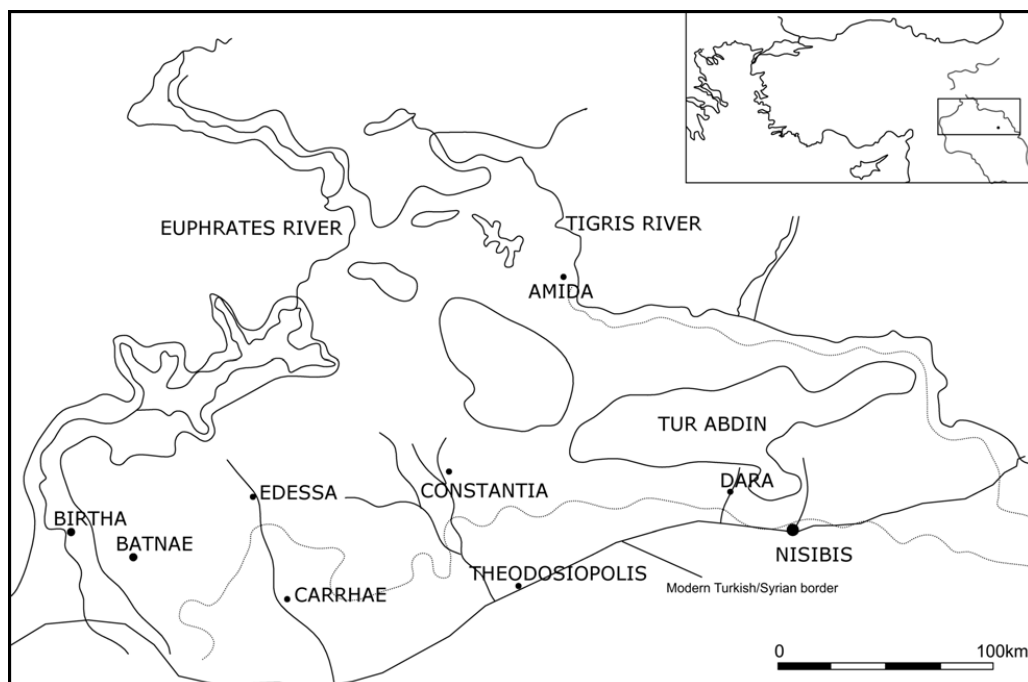


Figure 20: Northern Mesopotamia and Tur Abdin (Keser-Kayaalp and Erdoğan, 2013: 138)



Figure 21: Roman agora and the main road in Dara (Author's photo)



Figure 22: The ruins of the walls of Dara at the end of the main street (Author's photo)

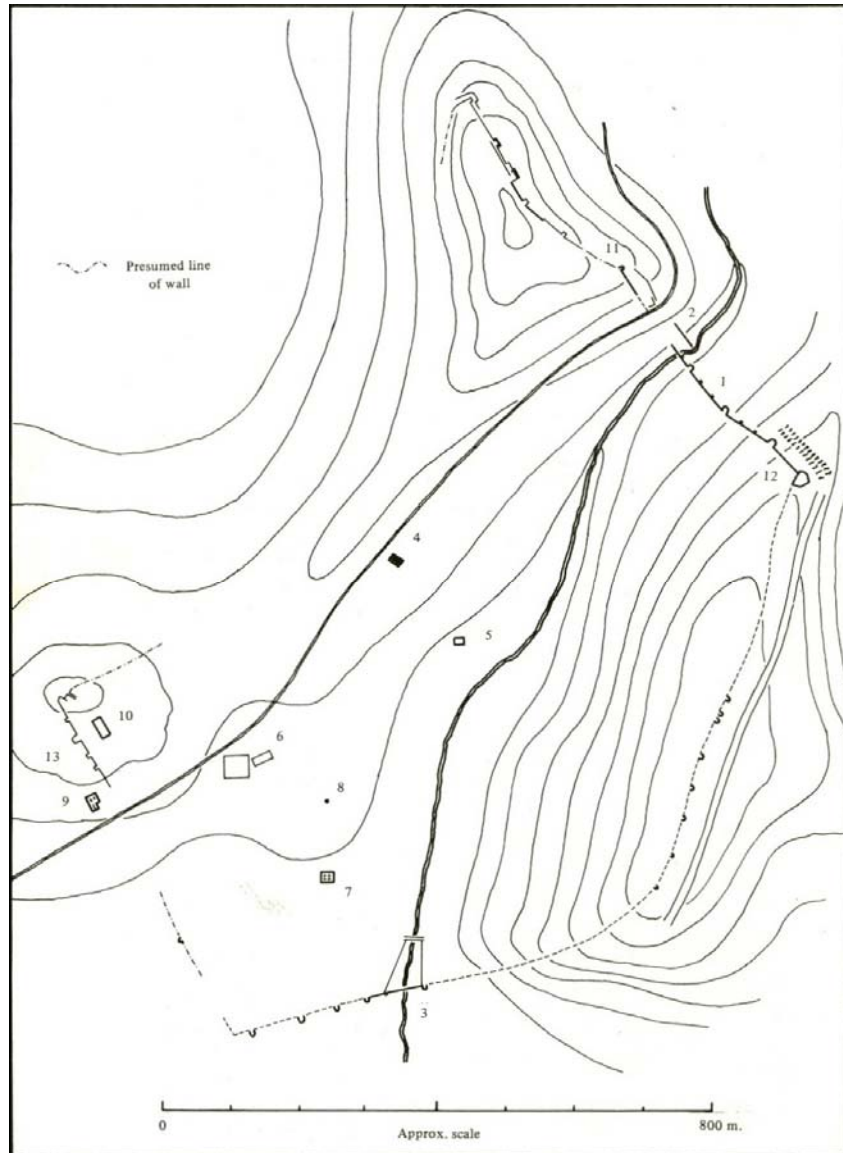


Figure 23: Dara, sketch plan of the walled area (Sinclair, 1989: 220)

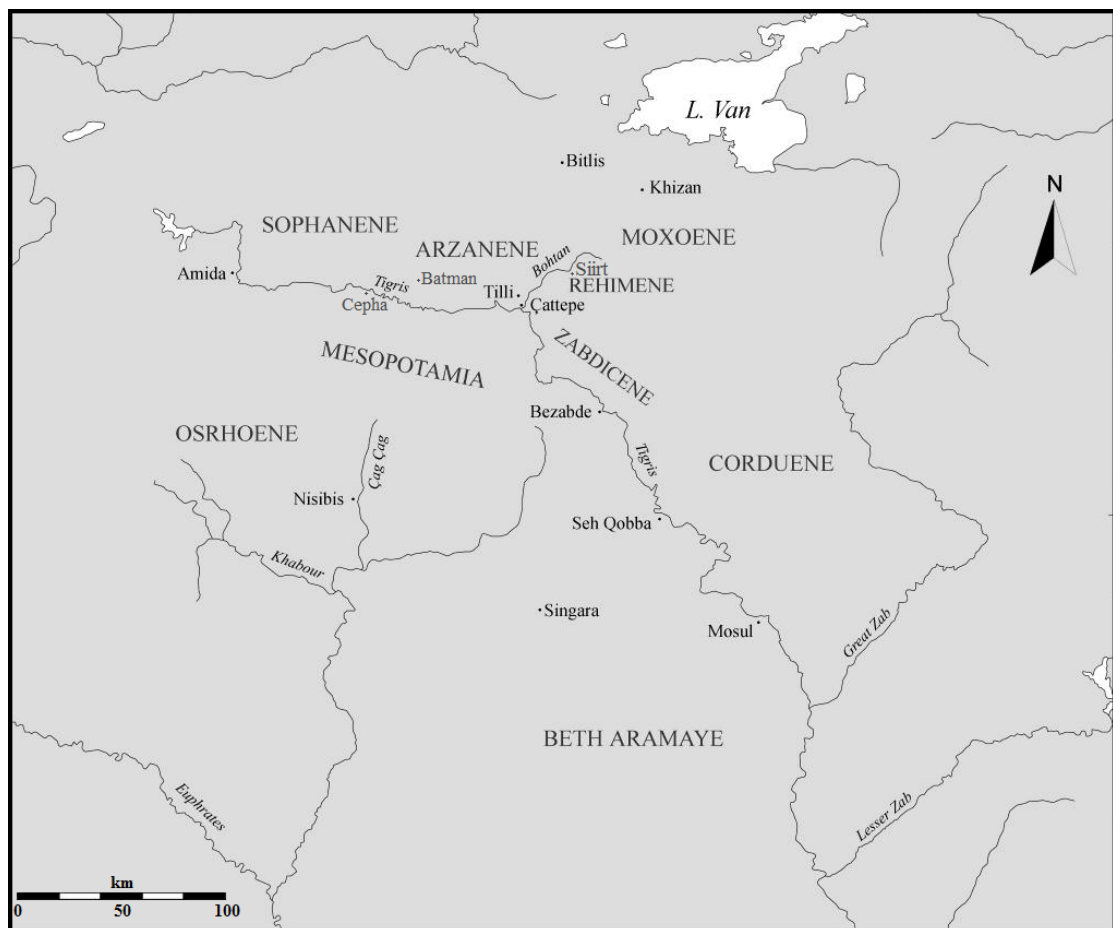


Figure 24: The Trans-Tigris Provinces
(map adapted from <https://uottawa.academia.edu/GeoffreyGreatrex>)

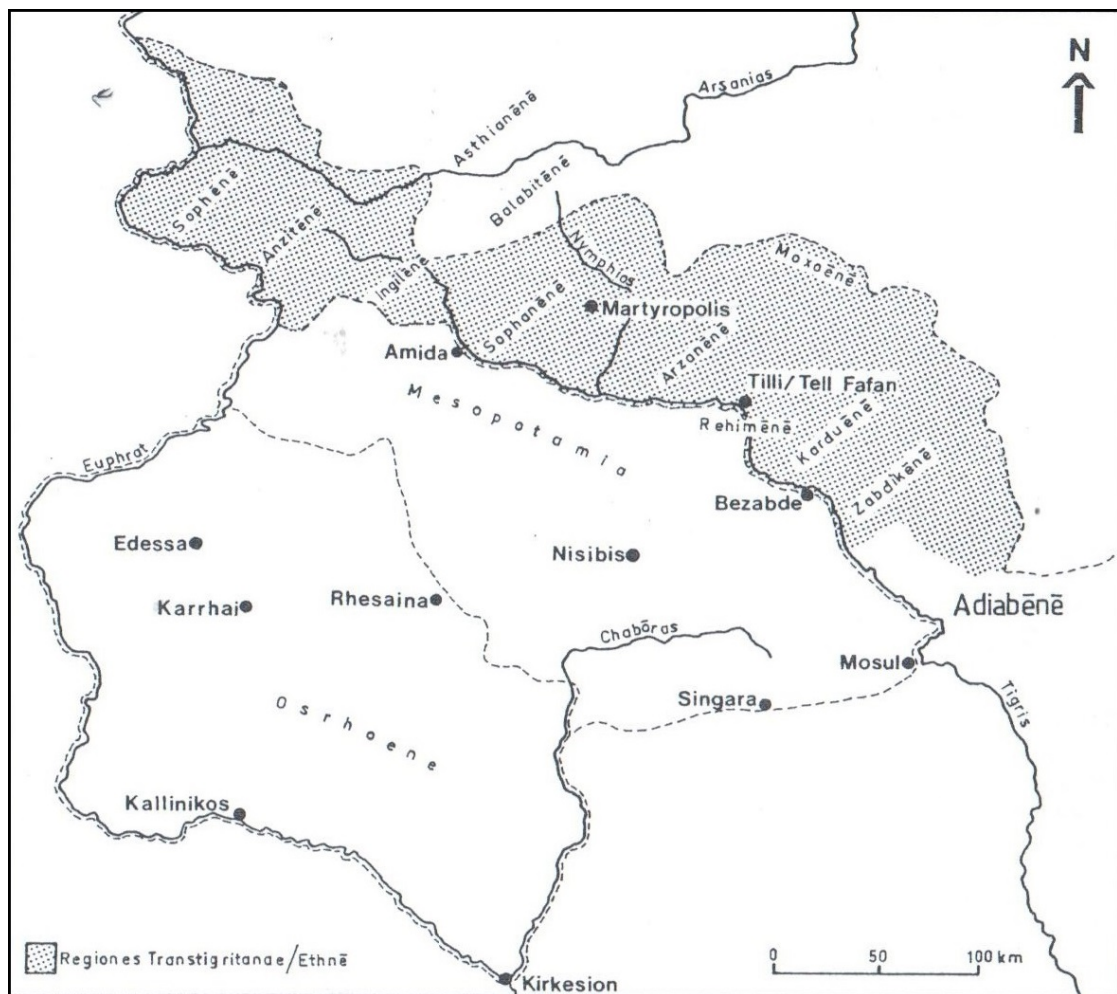


Figure 25: Roman Mesopotamia after the Peace of 299 (Lee, 1993: Map 5)

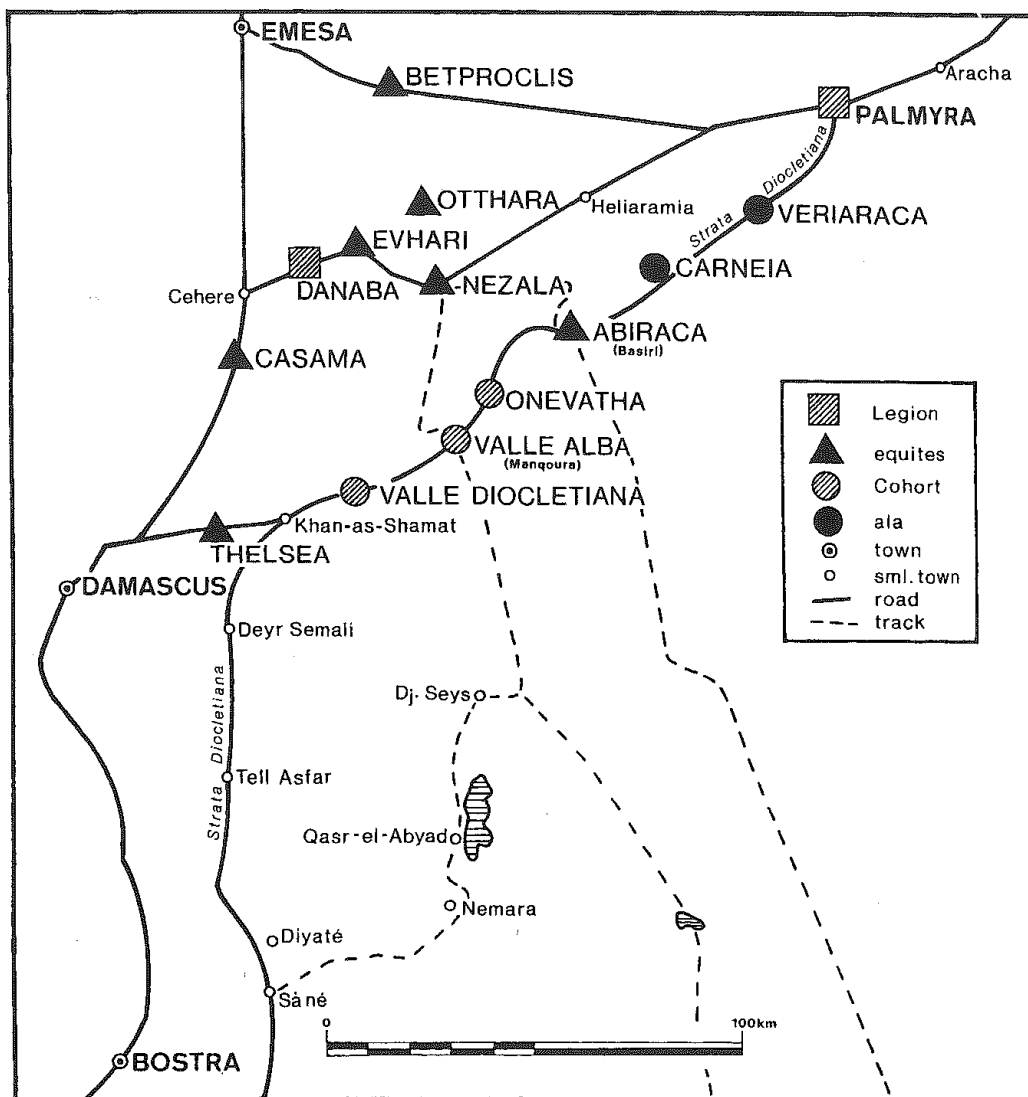


Figure 26: Diocletian's fortification route to the south in Syria, *Strata Diocletiana* (Southern, 2007: 243)

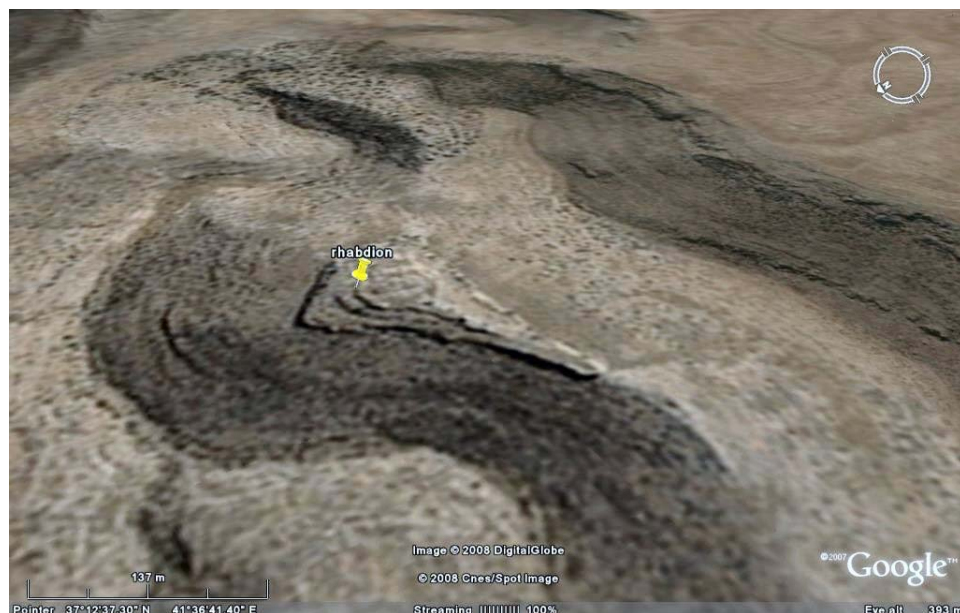


Figure 27: Location of Hatem-Tai castle (Rhabdion?) (Comfort, 2008a: 322)

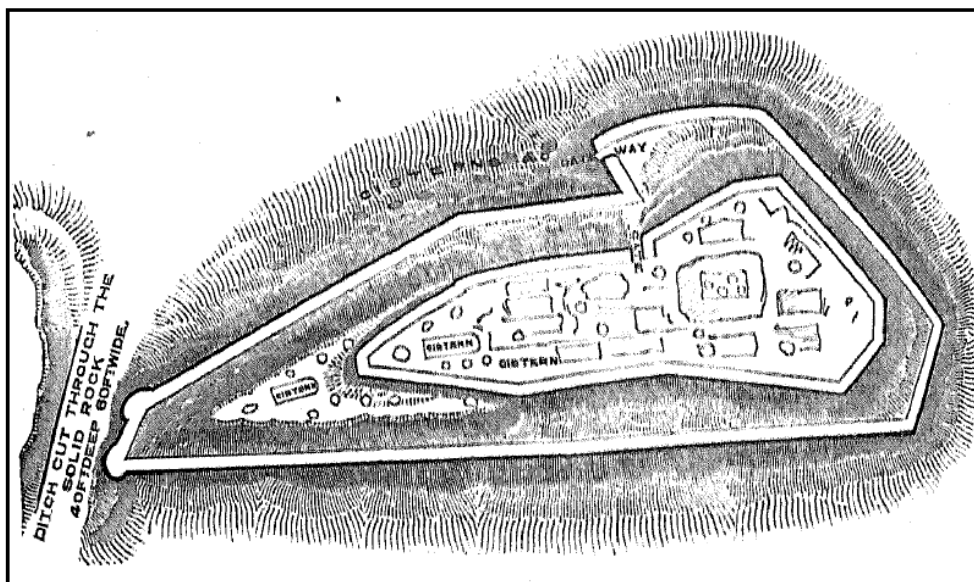


Figure 28: Sketch plan of Hatem-Tai castle (Rhabdion?) (Comfort, 2008a: 322)



Figure 29: Roman-Persian frontier in 387 and 591
(map adapted from <http://commons.wikimedia.org>)

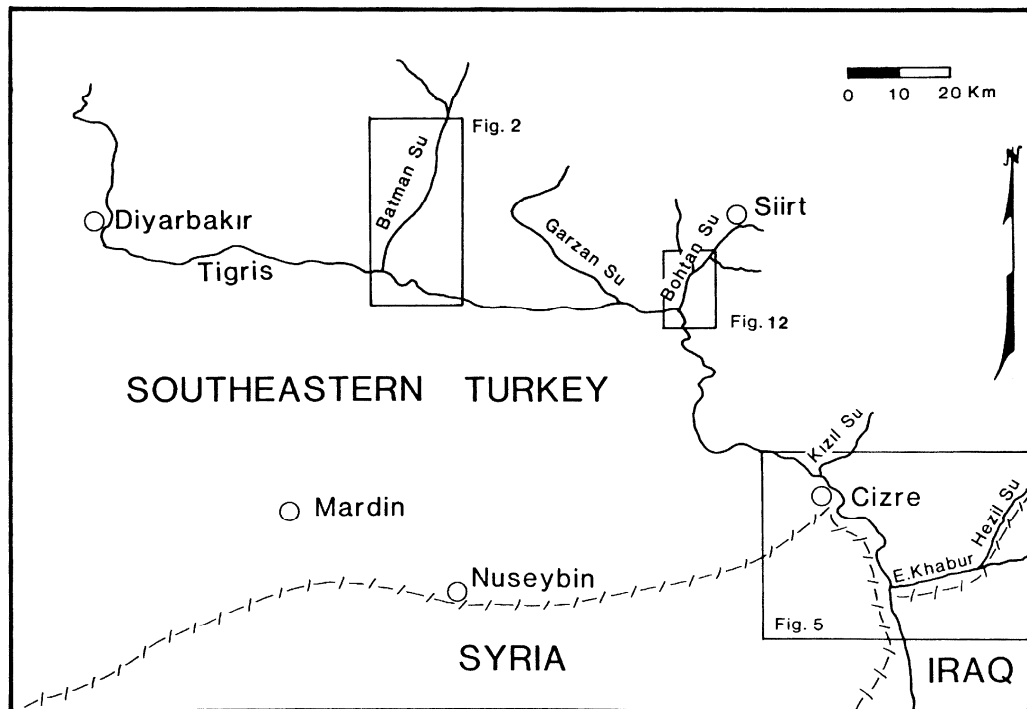


Figure 30: The Tigris-Euphrates Archaeological Reconnaissance Project survey area in the Upper Tigris Basin (Algaze et al., 2012: Fig. 1)



Figure 31: Çattepe, general view of the mound during the excavations of 2013 (1. North-west tower; 2. North-west walls; 3. The gateway; 4. The riverside storehouse) (Sağlamtimur, 2013: excavation photo archive)



Figure 32: North-west tower of Çattepe. Above: view before the excavations began (Sağlamtimur, 2012: Fig. 7b; Velibeyoğlu et al., 2002: Fig. 26)



Figure 33: Çattepe walls that have been unearthed over a length of ca. 200 m. in the western part facing the Tigris River (Sağlamtimur, 2013: excavation photo archive)

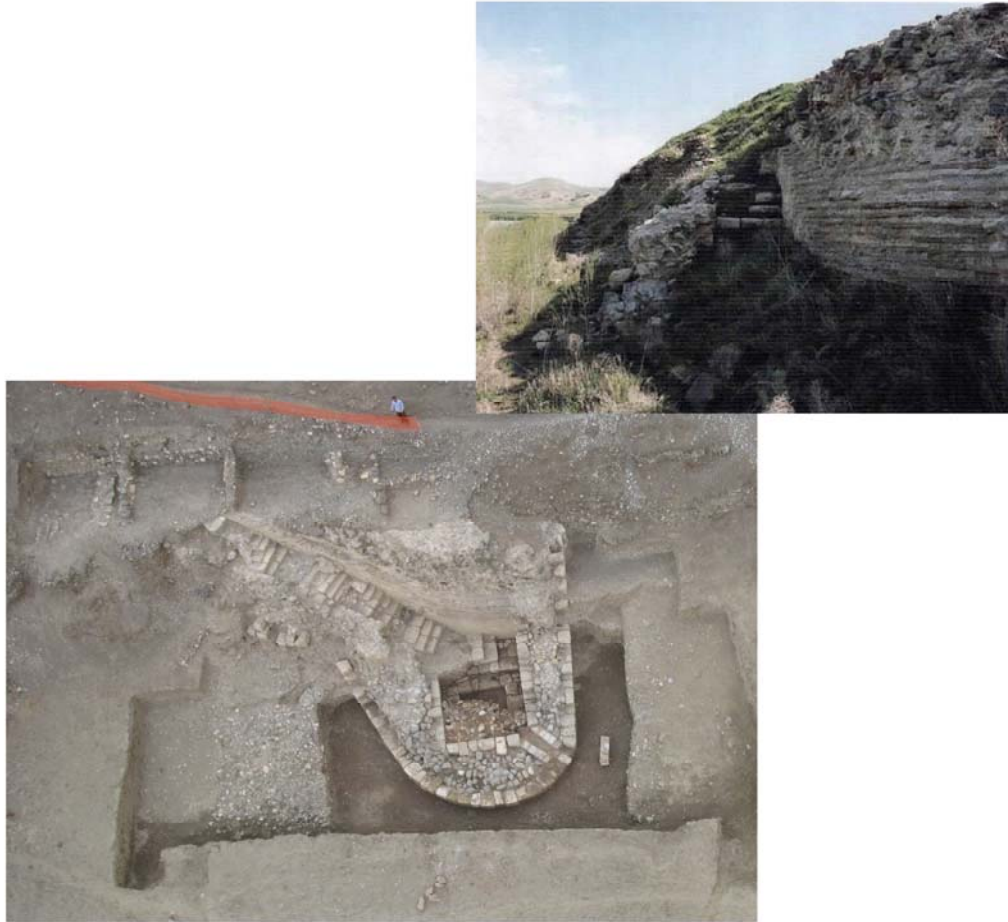


Figure 34: The riverside storehouse from Çattepe. Above: view before the excavations began (Sağlamtimur, 2012: 14a-b; Velibeyoğlu et al., 2002: Fig. 31)



Figure 35: Coins from Çattepe. (a-b) Constantius II (AD 337-361); (c) Constantius Gallus (AD 351-354) (Sağlamtimur, 2012: Fig. 9-11)



Figure 36: Inscribed altar from Çattepe (Sağlamtimur, 2012: Fig. 8)



Figure 37: A detailed aerial photo of Eski Hendek (Bezabde?) (Comfort, 2008a: 286)

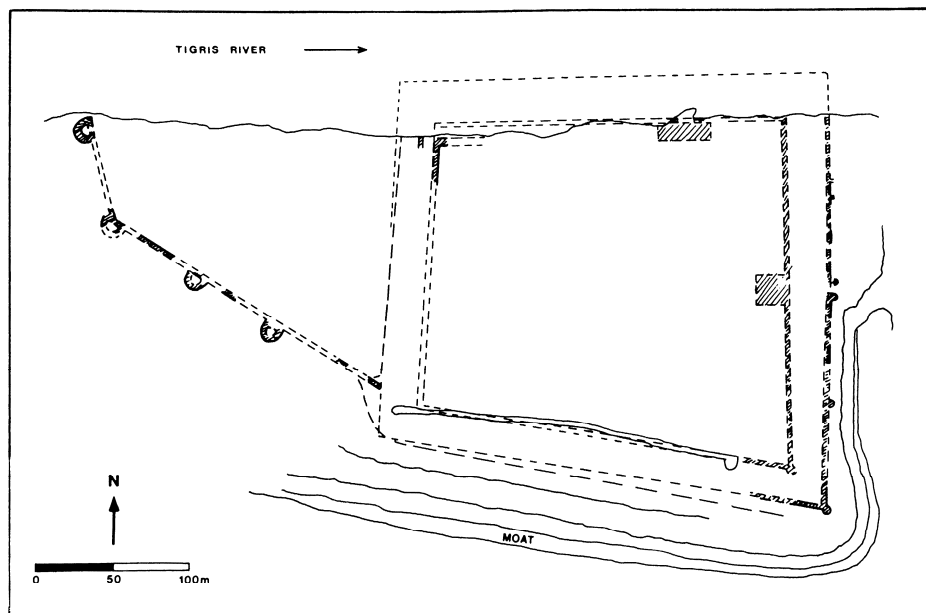


Figure 38: Sketch plan of Eski Hendek castle (Algaze et al. 1988, Fig. 11)



Figure 39: Strategic location of Bezabde across from the Persian fortress Fenik (Phaenicha?) (Çevik, 2011: Pict. 2)

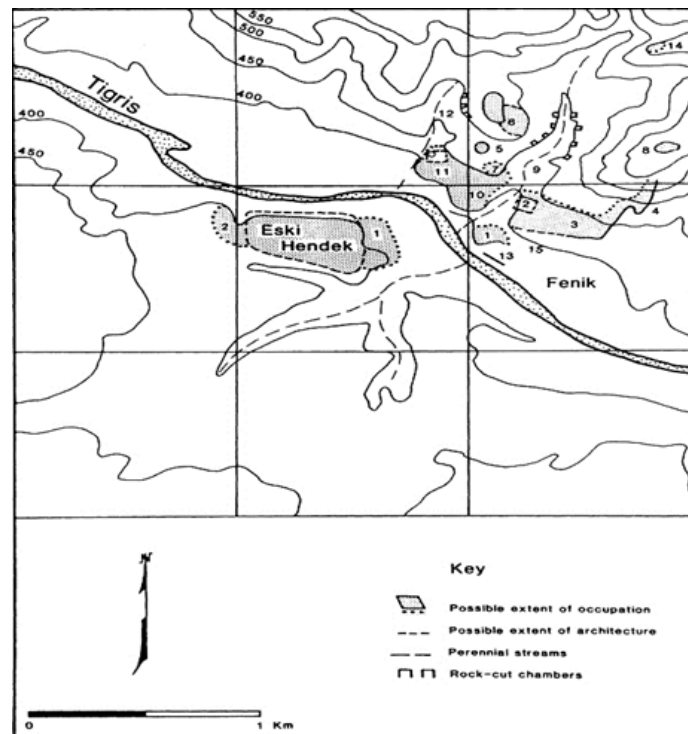


Figure 40: Contour map of Eski Hendek castle across from Fenik (Phaenicha?) (Algaze, 2012: Fig. 9)



Figure 41: View of eastern walls of Eski Hendek castle (Çevik, 2011: 12)



Figure 42: A bastion on the eastern side of Eski Hendek (Çevik, 2011: 11)



Figure 43: An aerial photo showing the location of Üçtepe (Charcha) (Comfort, 2008a: Fig. 290)

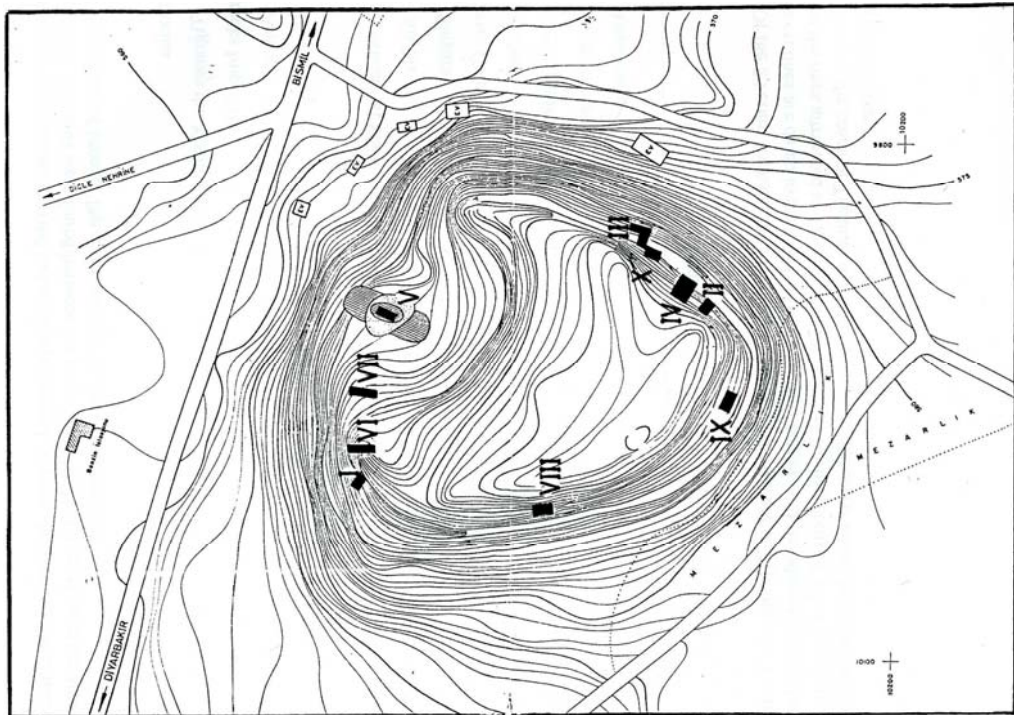


Figure 44: Topographic plan of Üçtepe and the excavated areas (Sevin, 1993, Fig. 1)

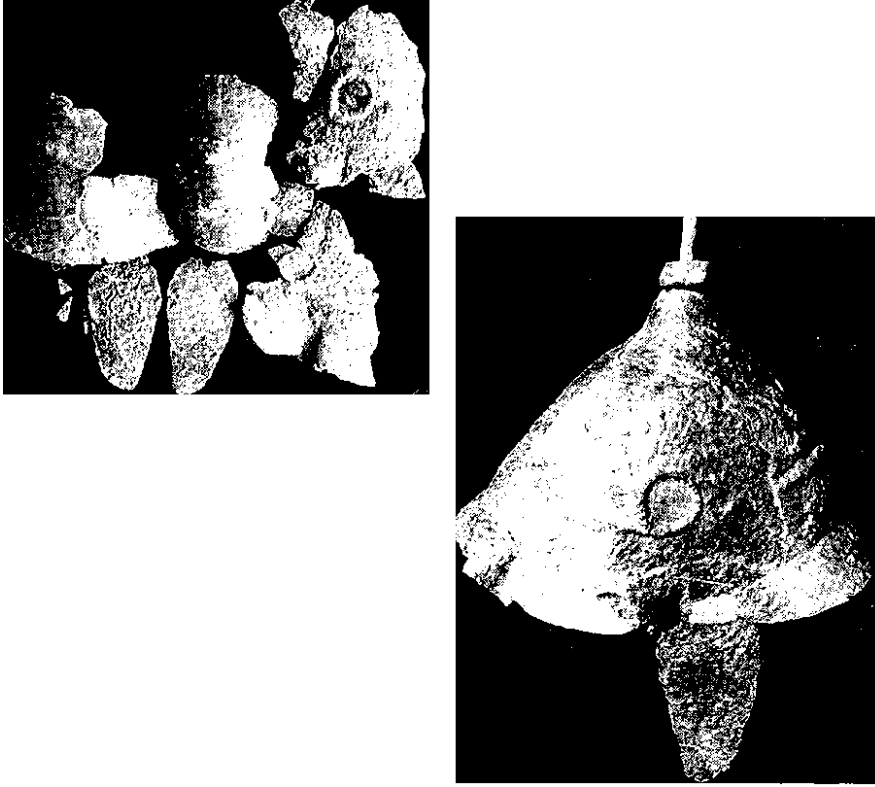


Figure 45: Iron Helmet fragments from Üçtepe. Below: the helmet after the Restoration (Sevin, 1992: Fig. 11-12)



Figure 46: Late Roman coins from Üçtepe. First one is identified as Julia Mamaea, second and third ones are busts of Gordian III and Tranquillina, facing each other (Tekin, 1992: 12, 16, 17)

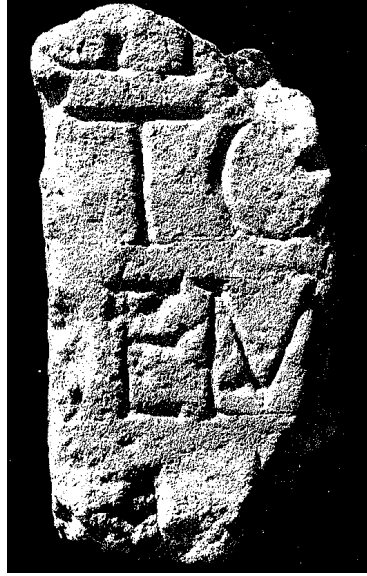


Figure 47: Fragment of a Latin inscription from Üçtepe (Lightfoot and Healey, 1991: 8)



Figure 48: Glass objects from Diyarbakır Museum collection (Barın, 2007, Cat. No 1)

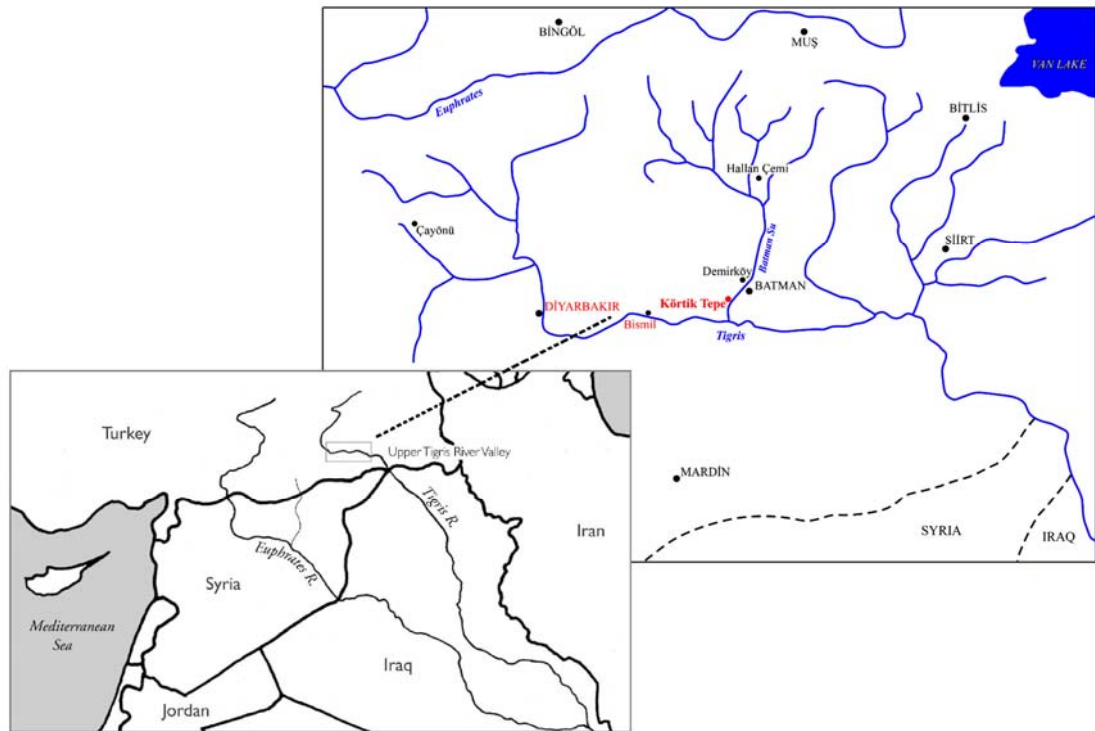


Figure 49: Upper Tigris Archaeological Research Project survey area and location of Körtik Tepe (map adapted from <http://arcserver.usc.edu>)

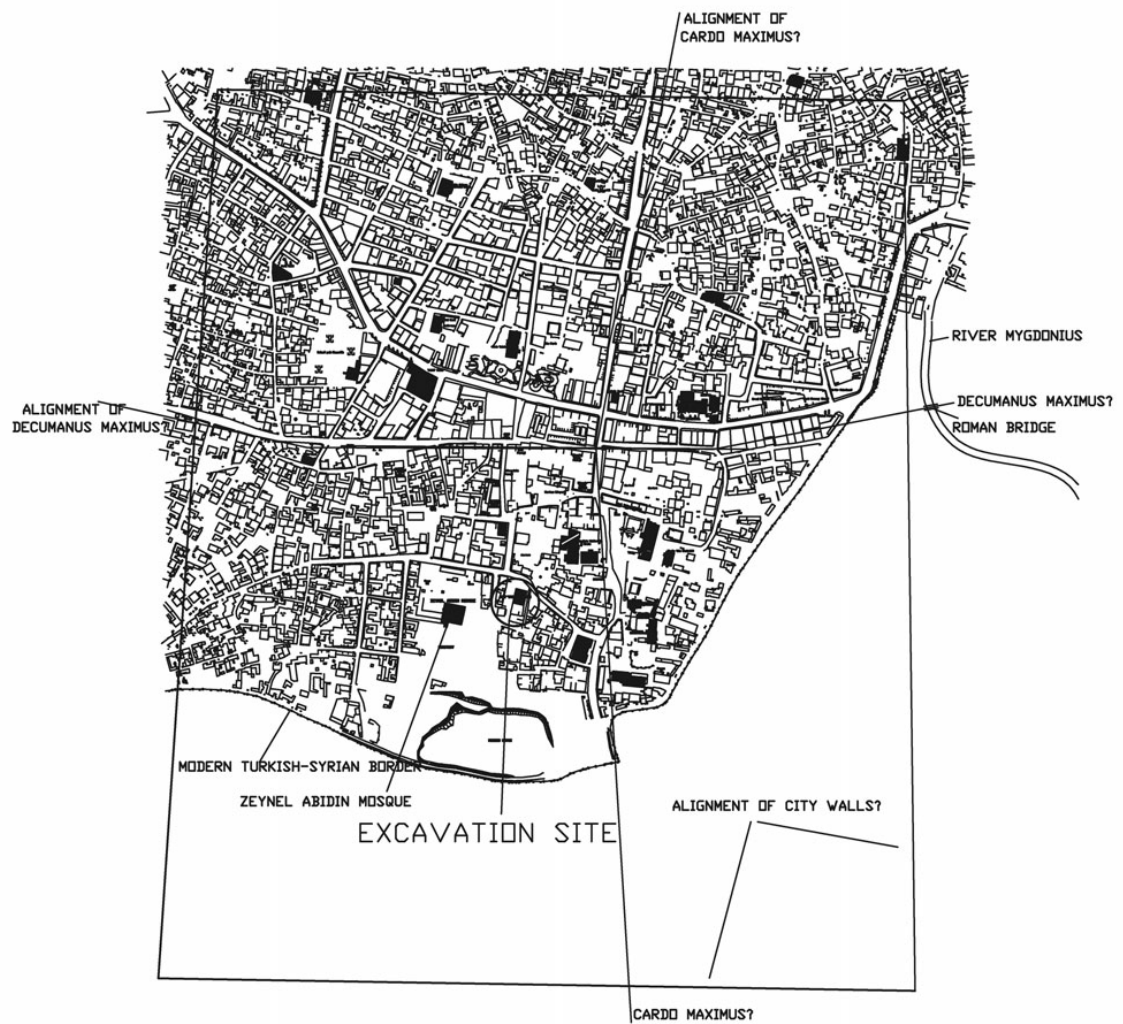


Figure 50: The hypothetical contours of Late Antique Nisibis
(Keser-Kayaalp and Erdoğan, 2013: Fig. 2)



Figure 51: The excavations located to the west of the Church of Mor Yakub
(Keser-Kayaalp and Erdoğan, 2013: Fig. 4)



Figure 52: Excavations located to the south of the Church of Mor Yakub
(Keser-Kayaalp and Erdoğan, 2013: Fig. 24)



Figure 53: The western and southern façades of the Church of Mor Yakub
(Keser-Kayaalp and Erdoğan, 2013: Fig. 8)

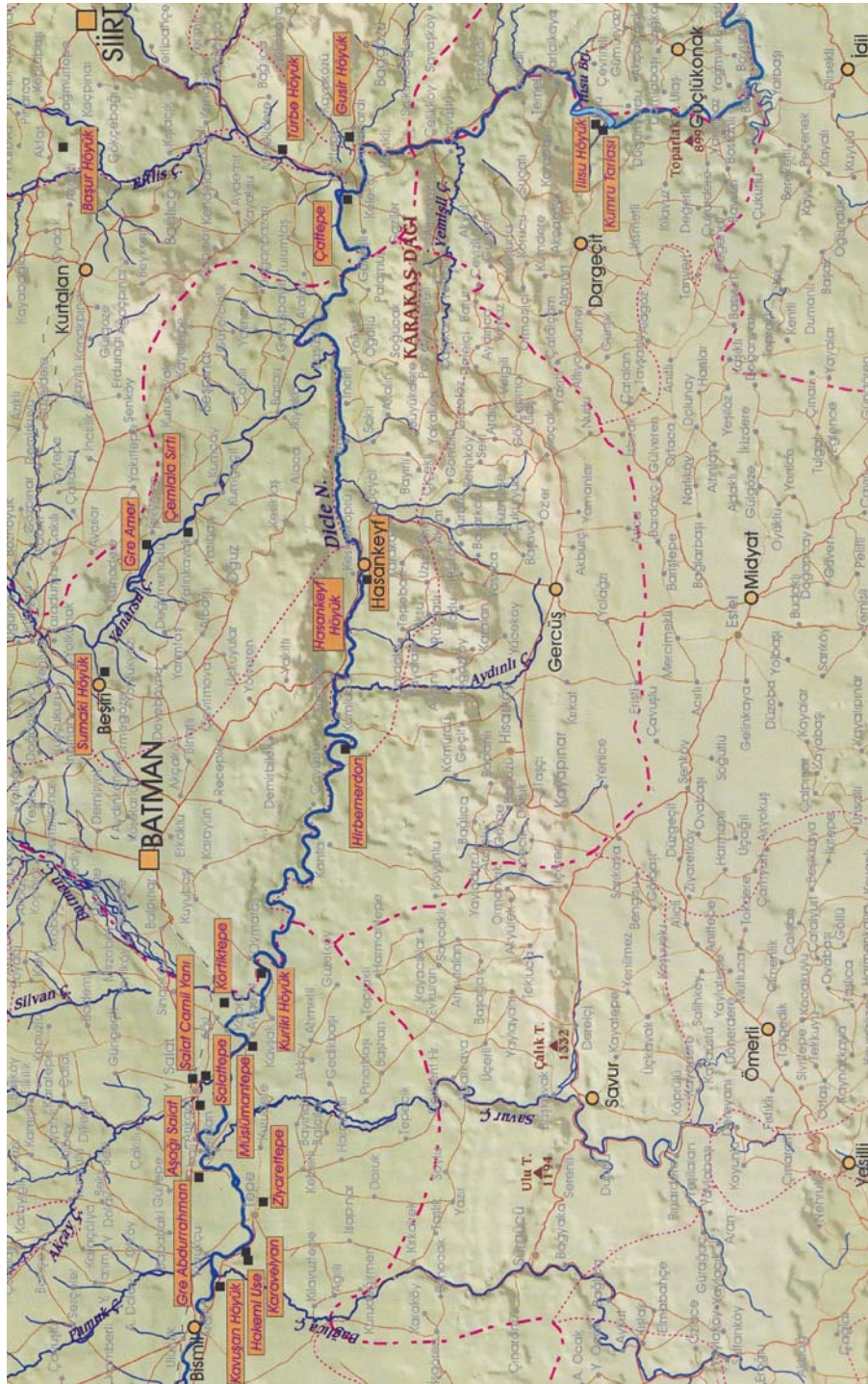


Figure 54: Salvage excavations conducted in Ilisu Dam area (Karul, 2013: 149)



Figure 55: Ancient road of Hasankeyf and a Roman gateway (Uluçam, 2013: Fig. 3)



Figure 56: The excavation of the Great Palace in the Upper Town (Uluçam, 2013: Fig. 10)

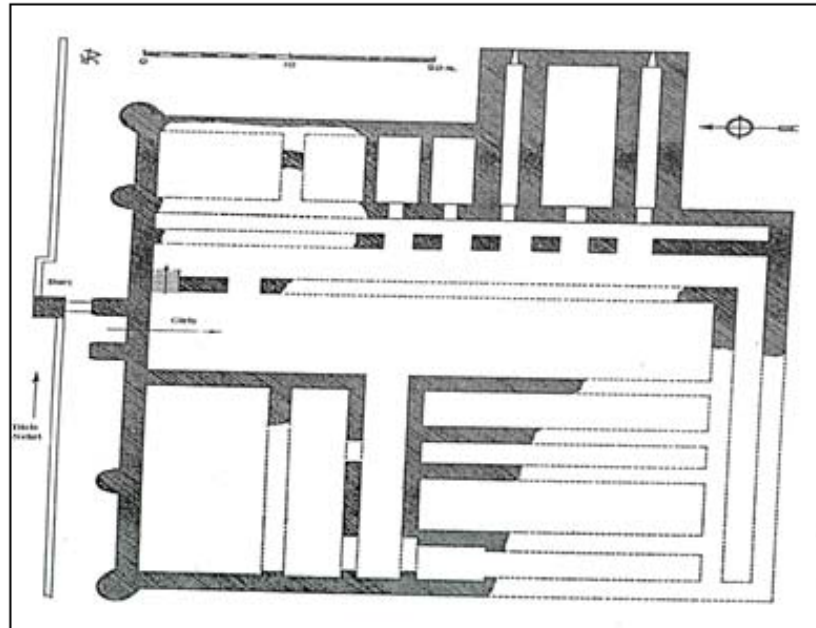


Figure 57: Plan of the Great Palace (Miynat, 2008: Plan 5)



Figure 58: The Citadel Road and shops (Uluçam, 2013: Fig. 7)



Figure 59: Roman mosaics from Hasankeyf (Uluçam, 2013: Fig. 13)



Figure 60: Salattepe, general view (Ökse, 2013: 83)



Figure 61: Kuriki Höyük, general view (Genç, Valentini and D'agostino, 2013: 125)



Figure 62: A building unit at Kuriki Höyük dated to the Roman-Parthian Period (Genç, Valentini and D'agostino, 2013: 126)

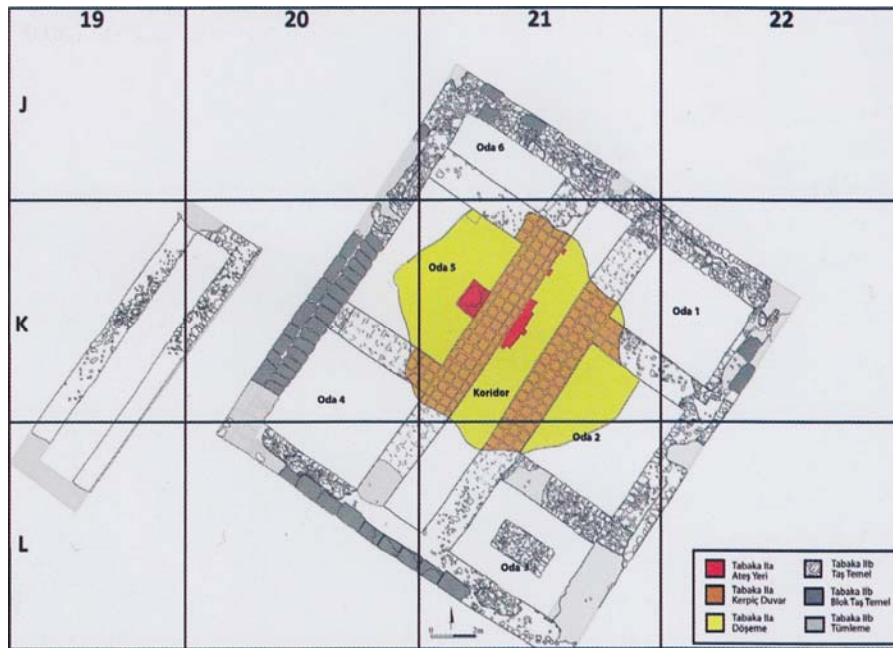


Figure 63: Kuriki Höyük, the plan of the building unit (Genç, Valentini and D'agostino, 2013: 126)



Figure 64: Late Roman settlement at Ilısu Höyük (Ökse, 2013: 148)

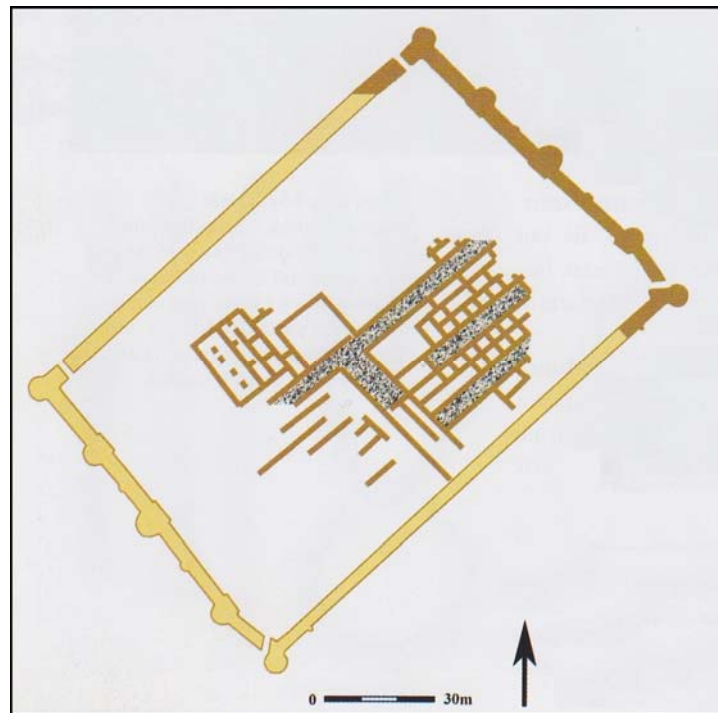


Figure 65: Ilısu Höyük, the plan of the settlement (Ökse, 2013: 148)



Figure 66: Parade masks from Ilısu Höyük (Brunwasser, 2013: 10)



Figure 67: Parade mask, after conservation (Ökse, 2013: 142)